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SKETCHING A NEW CONSERVATIVE EDUCATION AGENDA

Edited by

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AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

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APRIL 2021

Seeking to imagine what a robust conservative education agenda might look like, we invited a collection of education thinkers to sketch brief proposals that go beyond the traditional conservative litany. We hope this anthology of ideas sparks creativity on the right and deepens our sense of what is possible when it comes to improving American education.

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Introduction

When it comes to education, conservatives have been better at explaining what we're against than what we favor. Everyone knows that conservatives mostly oppose federal overreach, reckless spending, racial quotas, and teachers unions. But what are we for, exactly? It often seems that the list begins and ends with school choice, free speech, and keeping Washington out of education.

The odd thing is that conservatives are positioned to lead much more effectively on education than we currently do. The left's entanglements with unions, public bureaucracies, and the academy leave it as the paymaster for the education establishment. This helps explain why the Democratic litany of education proposals seems to consist mostly of new ways to subsidize and supersize the status quo—policies like free college, student-loan forgiveness, teacher pay raises, and universal prekindergarten. Such measures, whatever their shortcomings as policy, have the virtue of allowing progressive officials to sing from a common hymnal.

Unburdened by those entanglements that stymie the left's creativity, the right should be free to reimagine institutions and arrangements in ways that the left is not. And yet, the right has not seized this opportunity. Instead, for close to two decades, it has repeated the mantra of "more choice, less Washington" and, in turn, failed to put a dent in Democrats' edge in education polling. The problem is not that the mantra is wrong, per se; it is that the prescription is massively incomplete, with only a glancing relevance to most Americans' kitchen-table concerns.

It is time for a more robust conservative education agenda.

In that spirit, we invited an estimable group of conservative education thinkers to sketch policy proposals that they would like to see in a new education agenda, not knowing exactly what the exercise might yield. The only requirement was that they offer suggestions that would complement—and not just rehash—the traditional conservative litany. Other than that, no rules.

The proposals that flooded in span a remarkable array of topics, everything from a national citizenship curriculum to an appraisal market for K–12 education to the replacement of the student loan system with an income share agreement program. We've loosely organized 23 such proposals into three buckets for this volume.

The first of these buckets is "Educational Innovations," which encompasses ideas that challenge the status quo and offer alternatives to the current state of classroom, school, and district affairs. The second is "Civic and Philanthropic Leadership," which includes proposals that can best be driven forward by private citizens, corporations, or philanthropic institutions. The third and final category is "Policy Proposals," which includes proposals that rely on government action, be it federal, state, or local. While far from an exhaustive way to capture different approaches to tackling America's educational challenges, these are a useful place to start.

This collection of essays is not intended as a comprehensive package or even a list of prescriptions. Indeed, some of the proposals are in tension with one another. Rather, in the spirit of AEI's fierce commitment to the competition of ideas, the hope is that this thinking will deepen our sense of what is possible when it comes to improving American education.

Part I: Educational Innovations

Unburdened by entanglements with unions, public bureaucracies, and the academy and unbeholden to the ever-shifting currents of woke orthodoxy, the right is free to reimagine institutions and arrangements in ways the left is not. The following reports capitalize on this advantage with educational innovations that put students first and interrupt the US education system's fixation with the status quo.

An Appraisal Market for K–12 Education

Lindsey Burke

Think about the last time you bought or sold a pricey item. Chances are you had that item appraised by an independent appraisal firm to provide peace of mind to both buyer and seller.

The appraisal process is used in numerous settings. Sellers pay to have their homes appraised, and buyers use those appraisals to better understand if the home has any defects or needs any repairs. Lenders also use appraisals to make sure the collateral they are provided is worth at least as much as what they're lending to the borrower.

Appraisals are used in antique and jewelry markets and when buying cars or boats. There's the American Society of Equine Appraisers, the Appraisers Association of America, the Antique Appraisal Association of America, and the International Gemological Institute. Basically, any costly expense with a high potential for information asymmetry has an associated appraisal market.

Yet, while taxpayers spend more than $182,000, on average, for a child's K–12 education, no similar appraisal market exists in education. It's an expense that, in the aggregate, would likely rank among the top five purchases most families make in their lifetime.

Families should be able to easily acquire real-time, external audits of their child's learning. Giving parents the financial flexibility with their child's education funding to participate in an education appraisal market would help accomplish that goal.

States and local school districts could help families do this by separating the evaluation of education from the providers of that education. Funding for diagnostic and evaluative testing should be provided to parents separately from the per-pupil dollars spent on their child in district and charter schools or separated out from vouchers and tax credit scholarships. Families should be able to use a portion of that money to hire outside companies to independently evaluate where their child is academically, using that information to hold a school or education provider accountable for results.

To be sure, many tools that evaluate schools already exist. Audits such as Niche, GreatSchools, and state report cards provide external audits. More granular information about how a child is doing in the classroom is typically provided by the teacher through parent-teacher conferences or summative assessments that provide accurate, yet dated, information to parents. Parents need a better way to get up-to-date, accurate information on school or tutor performance from an external auditor.

Companies such as DreamBox Learning provide math curriculum, lessons, and formative and summative assessments for elementary and middle school students, and it's available to parents for about $100 per year. Other companies such as Zearn Math and Lexia provide adaptive literacy and math assessments for students. Seton Testing Services provides ability, diagnostic, and standardized tests. Curvebreakers offers preparation for Regents exams and Advanced Placement courses, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt provides extensive book-based tests and online assessment tools.

Princeton Review and Kaplan are familiar names in the test-prep and evaluation market, particularly for older students as they prepare for college. Kumon, the College Board, BJU Press, and Bayside School Services provide tutoring, online courses, curriculum, and

assessments. Parents can also pay for private tutors who can assess where their child is academically.

All these options provide a valuable service to parents: an external audit from an entity outside the school or teacher that is teaching their child. And the more education dollars are freed up to be student-centered and portable, enabling parents to direct a portion of their child's per-pupil spending to external assessment companies, the more evaluation options will become available in the market.

More fundamentally, separating education from its evaluation would help parents hold providers accountable. As EdChoice Director of Policy Jason Bedrick often notes, "True accountability is when service providers are directly answerable to the people most affected by their performance."[1] Those service providers are held accountable in education by parents equipped with information about provider performance and the ability to vote with their feet when a particular option isn't meeting their child's needs.

This practice is already in effect to some extent in K–12 education with micro-credentials. Arizona figured it out early on, when it allowed education savings account funds to be used for assessments and diagnostic tests.

For too long, accountability has been defined as state standardized tests (which are even federally mandated) coupled with reporting requirements to government officials. This vertical "accountability" upward to state and federal officials has not enabled parents to hold providers—particularly public schools—accountable for results. Giving families the option to take some of their funds and pay directly for diagnostic and standardized tests to both understand where their child is and hold providers accountable would increase horizontal accountability to parents. It's a modest but meaningful step that conservatives should be for and one that is imminently achievable.

Notes

1. Jason Bedrick, "Real Accountability Is Choice, Not Regulation," Jay P. Greene's Blog, https://jaypgreene.com/2017/01/27/real-accountability-is-choice-not-regulation/.

"Charter Teachers" to Expand Choice and Transform Schooling

Juliet Squire

Despite decades of policy initiatives at all levels of government, education advocates and policymakers have yet to find a way to catalyze the most important in-school factor for student learning: the classroom teacher. TNTP has documented the "pervasive neglect of the nation's best teachers."[1] Frederick Hess has shown just how easy and common it is for a web of rules and processes to stymie teachers' creativity and entrepreneurialism.[2] And EdChoice's *2019 Schooling in America* survey indicates that fewer than one in four teachers would recommend the profession to others.[3]

What if we unleashed the talent, passion, and initiative of individual teachers to more flexibly cultivate individual students' potential? Just as schools receive charters to run independently of districts, teachers could receive charters to run classrooms independently of schools. In addition to providing teachers with more autonomy, doing so would give families the opportunity to select not the *school* their child attends but the *individual* who guides their child's learning and development.

There are many ways to translate this idea into policy and practice. One approach would be for state-level leaders to establish a process for teachers to apply for a charter and become charter teachers. Once approved, teachers could develop and communicate their vision for students' day-to-day classroom experience and their own pedagogical approach to families. Families could consider this information, alongside information from various public and private sources, and identify and select teachers for their children. To maximize equitable access, families could then enroll their children through a transparent process akin to charter school lotteries.

Empowering families with choice at the individual teacher level may sound like a pipe dream, but, in fact, similar configurations of teaching and learning already exist. Alongside numerous tutoring organizations, such as Kumon, and online learning portals, such as OutSchool, there are more than 200 microschools across the country. Microschools often serve fewer than 70 students, and many have just a single teacher serving a small group of students.[4] However, they operate primarily in the private sector and rely on tuition, private capital, and philanthropy to operate. A charter teacher policy would allow these and other models to emerge in the public sector, pairing the benefits of public revenue with more equitable access for families.

The result might place charter teachers in a role similar to that of primary care physicians with their own medical practice. Just as parents choose a physician to care for their child, they could choose their child's teacher. Just as a physician might hire a nurse or a medical assistant, teachers could hire someone to support them with anything from data analysis to classroom management, depending on the skills that best complement their own. Just as physicians can decide how many patients to serve, with agency over the trade-offs in compensation and lifestyle, teachers could also exert control over the oft-debated merits of smaller class sizes by deciding for themselves how many students they serve. And just as physicians leverage other outfits for lab tests, procedures, or specialist opinions, teachers could form cooperatives with trusted colleagues to support distinct student needs.

Charter teacher policies can, and should, vary among states. For instance, some states may launch programs to provide teachers with small startup grants to launch their practice; others may rely on philanthropy or other sources of private funding. Some states might leverage educational savings accounts, in which parents access and deploy their child's per-pupil funding to various education providers, including teachers. Some states might draw on the "backpack funding" model and have each child's per-pupil funding follow them to their teacher of choice. Others might create a combination, in which students' base levels of funding follow them to their teachers, but families can flexibly direct supplemental funds for other purposes. Regardless, the additional funding currently allocated to high-need students through state and federal programs could provide incentives, remuneration, and supports for teachers to serve them.

State-level leaders could also try different approaches to accountability. Some may apply standard accountability measures that, like those applied to charter schools, are limited to outcomes rather than inputs. Some may take a more market-based approach and rely on families to impose accountability by voting with their feet. Others might strike a middle ground, combining common measures of accountability for student learning with systems for collecting and reporting parent and student feedback.

Regardless of how state policies vary, policymakers will need to trust teachers as professionals and resist inevitable efforts to reregulate or standardize instruction. They will need to embrace teaching and learning that will—and should—look markedly different than what they're used to. And they will need to embrace the humility necessary in any new endeavor, working incrementally to improve the policy design and its effectiveness over time.

Beyond the direct impact on students and families, a charter teacher policy could have several benefits for the education system as a whole: It could elevate the teaching profession and help retain talented educators by giving them control and agency over their own classrooms and careers. It could also attract a new generation of educators previously disenchanted by the idea of working in a large bureaucracy. It could reengage former educators in more flexible or part-time opportunities. And, as charter teachers become the leaders of the profession, the chartering process could pressure schools of education and licensing boards to rethink their approach, which has proven durable, despite limited evidence of effectiveness. Finally, charter teachers could foster direct communication, collaboration, and accountability between families and teachers and build the school-to-home partnerships that help students realize their potential.

Past efforts to reform schooling have yet to yield the game-changing results that families and students need, but neither have they created opportunities for teachers to put the full weight of their skill and ingenuity into the challenge. A charter teacher policy could be just that opportunity.

Notes

1. TNTP, "The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America's Urban Schools," 2012, https://tntp.org/publications/view/the-irreplaceables-understanding-the-real-retention-crisis.

2. Frederick M. Hess, *The Cage-Busting Teacher* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2015).

3. Paul Diperna, Drew Catt, and Michael Shaw, *2019 Schooling in America: Public Opinion on K–12 Education, Busing, Technology, School Choice*, EdChoice, 2019, https://www.edchoice.org/research/2019-schooling-in-america-survey/.

4. Juliet Squire, Melissa Steel King, and Justin Trinidad, *Working Toward Equitable Access and Affordability: How Private Schools and Microschools Seek to Serve Middle- and Low-Income Students*, Bellwether Education Partners, 2019, https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/toward-equitable-access-and-affordability-how-private-schools-and-microschools-seek.

Hybrid Homeschooling

Michael Q. McShane

"Our school is for families that feel sad at back-to-school time."[1]

So says Thomas Ragsdell, the head of school at Heritage Academy of Columbia, Missouri. Heritage Academy is a hybrid homeschool. Its 84 students attend formal classes on campus on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and are homeschooled on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Doing so gives families "the gift of time" in a world where children are frequently overscheduled but under-nurtured.

Homeschooling is an increasingly popular school choice. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of homeschooled children doubled from 1999 to 2016, and now almost two million students are homeschooled, more than 3 percent of America's student population.[2]

Homeschooling can be challenging. Particularly as children age, parents can find themselves out of their depth trying to teach more advanced coursework. Many families also want their children to be part of a community while still maintaining primary control of their child's education. For them, traditional schools (whether public or private, religious or nonreligious) give too much away. Full-time homeschooling keeps too much in-house.

Enter hybrid homeschooling. Parents still occupy the central role in their child's education, but a school supports and structures their efforts. The format varies, with some schools operating as "4/1"—meaning four days at school and one day at home—and others as "3/2," "2/3," or "1/4."

Why is hybrid homeschooling a promising conservative education reform? Not all hybrid homeschoolers are conservative. Quite the contrary, in fact. But hybrid homeschooling creates an avenue for conservatives to build the types of schools that appeal to their values and desires at a price they can afford.

Any conservative education policy or practice should have three main attributes.

1. Recognize the Primacy of the Family

Free societies are founded on strong families. Education policy should use the family as the starting point of education and should integrate the family into the educational process. It was no less a conservative intellectual giant than Russell Kirk who argued in a 1977 lecture at Hillsdale College:

> For the family always has been the source and the center of community. In the phrase of Edmund Burke, the family is the origin of "the little platoon we belong to in society," and it is "the germ of public affections." . . . Its essential function is the rearing of children. Those societies of the past and the present which we call good societies have been strongly marked by powerful family ties. These have been societies possessed of a high degree of both order and freedom. Societies in which the family has been enfeebled have been disorderly and servile societies—lacking love, lacking security.[3]

Hybrid homeschools recognize that parents are their children's primary educators. Chris Harper, the head of school at Grace Prep in Arlington, Texas, the first University-Model school (a kind of hybrid homeschool) in America, put it to me this way:

> We're not going to usurp the role of the parent, we're actually going to come alongside the parent, and maybe where the parent doesn't know how to do calculus, we're going to provide that. We really believe that the parent is the first government, the first shepherd, the first educator in a child's life.[4]

2. Work with Civil Society Instead of Supplanting It

Cultivating and conserving the organizations that exist between the individual and the state has been recognized as a conservative principle since at least the time of Edmund Burke. It has started to take on more importance as individuals have become more atomized and the state has grown in power. As Robert Nisbet wrote:

> There must be in any stable culture, in any civilization that prizes its integrity, functionally significant and psychologically meaningful groups and associations lying intermediate to the individual and the larger values and purposes of his society. For these are the small areas of association within which alone such values and purposes can take on clear meaning in personal life and become the vital roots of the large culture.[5]

Atomized families are not the answer. Yoking them together with other families in a shared enterprise can strengthen and form them into stronger units.

Hybrid homeschools are little communities of like-minded parents working together to meet their children's academic, social, and spiritual needs. They often start in someone's living room, the excess space in the basement of a church, or, in the case of the Boone Prairie School in Whitestown, Indiana, a renovated tobacco barn. They work with institutions such as Hillsdale College to find curriculum and network through organizations such as University-Model Schools International and the Association of Classical Christian Schools. They create new institutions to help form their children into the types of people they want them to be.

3. Endeavor to Pass on the Store of Accumulated Knowledge

What do conservatives in education want to conserve? In addition to the family and civil society, conservatives want to conserve knowledge itself. Conservatives believe that mankind has accumulated knowledge over the years, often tucking it away in traditions, habits, and customs. They resist the call to destroy the old to make way for the new.

They also resist the postmodern tendency that has creeped into the education system to reject objective truth, morality, reason, language, and seemingly everything else of value. The ever-thoughtful Sir Roger Scruton wrote: "Once we see that the primary purpose of education is to safeguard knowledge, all the fairy castles of the educationists tumble in ruins. Hence they are up in arms, and, as so often, in arms against the truth."[6]

Many hybrid homeschools use a classical curriculum and pedagogy focused on preserving and transmitting the Western canon.

The Legacy Classical Christian Academy in Fort Worth, Texas, is one such school. The curriculum is divided into a grammar stage, a logic stage, and a rhetoric stage. Students progress through the great books and the major ideas of the Western canon, starting with songs, chants, and play as young children; working their way through logical fallacies and critical contemplation in Socratic seminars as they get older; and eventually progressing to essay writing and an oral defense their senior year. By way of example, the ninth graders read *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Old Testament, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Belinda Henson, the head of school, puts the goal plainly: "Ultimately, a classical education teaches students to learn to defend the heritage of Western civilization."[7]

Hybrid homeschooling is an opportunity for conservative families to work together in a shared

enterprise to create coherent formative institutions for their children. To be clear, it is an opportunity for families of other ideological persuasions to work together as well. But particularly for conservative families that feel isolated and besieged by an educational culture at odds with their values, hybrid homeschools can offer a refuge and opportunity for renewal and flourishing.

Notes

1. Thomas Ragsdell (head of school, Heritage Academy), in discussion with the author, September 10, 2019.
2. US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, "School Choice in the United States: 2019," September 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/schoolchoice/.
3. Russell Kirk, "The Little Platoon We Belong to in Society," *Imprimis* 6, no. 11 (November 1977), https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/the-little-platoon-we-belong-to-in-society-november-1977/.
4. Chris Harper (head of school, Grace Prep), in discussion with the author, September 18, 2019.
5. Robert Nisbet, "'The Quest for Community': A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom," in *The Essential Civil Society Reader*: *The Classic Essays*, ed. Don E. Eberly (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 46.
6. Roger Scruton, "What's the Point of Education?," *Spectator Life*, November 2016, https://www.roger-scruton.com/articles/384-what-s-the-point-of-education-spectator-life-nov-16.
7. Belinda Henson (head of school, Legacy Classical Christian Academy), in discussion with the author, April 28, 2020.

Bringing the Joy Back to Education

MICROSCHOOLING AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Matthew Ladner

The American K–12 system had serious problems even before the pandemic. Teachers were frustrated, and students suffered growing levels of anxiety and depression, not to mention the downward academic achievement trends of the past decade. A 44-year veteran of classroom teaching, for instance, opined last year that it's not the financial side—which has always been tough—that's the problem with teaching these days. Rather, he said, it's that "the joy has been strangled out of the profession."[1] It felt like we were spinning our wheels. COVID-19 greatly added to the misery, but some have used this adversity to pioneer novel schooling methods.

Thomas Edison said that genius is 99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration. By necessity, a great deal of perspiration—and some inspiration—went into adapting our education system during the outbreak.

A set of promising new schooling techniques has gained traction during the pandemic, which could bring joy back to education. Combined, they could create new opportunities for families and educators to make education more productive, more centered on family preferences, and even more fun for students and educators.

The first is hands-on distance learning to keep students engaged, such as the model created by New York City's Success Academy charter school network. In that model, the most effective teacher in the entire network of schools on any given subject delivered live instructional lectures, while other teachers broke students into smaller groups online to facilitate group discussion and projects.

This model enabled a system of schools to have 200 seventh graders learning from the most skilled math lecturer in the entire network. Then, with a touch of a digital button, the students could be divided into 20 groups of 10 students, led by teachers, for group work and discussions. Students could ask questions in both the larger and the small group settings. The digital platform that Success Academy used also allowed teachers to monitor ongoing assignments to identify students who were falling behind and proactively required students to attend online remedial tutoring sessions.

The Success Academy model resembles a digital version of a large college survey course. Some educators play the role of the professor, while others take on the role of small-group facilitator. This high-engagement technique is nearly the opposite of the recorded lectures of the massive open online course craze. Constant engagement between teachers and students kept this version of digital learning from going off the rails.

Many people, however, view education as an inherently social endeavor. We want and need face-to-face contact with classmates and teachers. If this type of hands-on distance-learning model were combined with a microschooling program, it could be a model for how to get the best of both worlds: better instruction and in-person community with reliable custodial care.

A model of microschooling to emulate might be Arizona's Prenda, which has organized a growing number of small schools (8–10 students) paired with an adult "guide" rather than a teacher. Prenda runs microschools in partnership with districts and charters as private schools. All Prenda students take Arizona's state academic exam.

Prenda is a bit like school meets scout troop. Students do distance learning with a one-to-one student-to-computer ratio—which, by the way, facilitated a relatively smooth transition during the spring shutdown. However, the real delight of the Prenda model lies in community and group projects. Students build robots, put on theatrical productions, and conduct and judge their own debates. They create videos, reports, computer programs, gardens, posters, dance routines, paintings, and more. Students can submit their own ideas for creative projects to Prenda, and approved projects go into a project log that students and guides throughout the network can use.

In combination, hands-on virtual learning and microschooling employing project-based learning could combine the academic advantages of scale with the joy of community. An increase of schooling pluralism, significantly more parental options, and additional career opportunities for teachers could be achieved. Different flavors of microschools could be created through a combination of family demand and distance affiliation. Like-minded families could enroll and affiliate with an institution through distance learning and create the kind of education they envision for their kids. Whether families are interested in the arts, STEM, classics, or a long list of other possibilities, the sky is the limit.

Under a "mothership and pods" model, the distance-learning partner could provide live academic lectures, while in-person guides would facilitate related projects, group activities, and discussions. This technique could enable high-demand schools with waiting lists to offer students either the traditional in-person experience or a microschool alternative model. It would also increase the level of academic expertise available to a small school.

Currently, high-demand charter schools struggle to raise millions of dollars to build new facilities to create new opportunities for students. This model would use preexisting space and thus represent a different path to reducing the waiting lists. With the advent of "pandemic pods" during the summer of 2020, this could take the form of high-demand schools enrolling pod students into their distance-learning program. This would allow schools to address equity concerns such as the ability to pay pod leaders and device and internet access with public funds.

American education needed a reboot before the COVID-19 outbreak, and the outbreak only increased the strain. But in the long run, we may benefit from the effort and brilliance of K–12 innovators whose methods were successful during the 2020 shutdown. Combining hands-on distance learning with in-person microschooling could expand opportunities for teachers and families while providing a new path forward for scaling the techniques used at high-demand schools.[2]

Notes

1. Matthew Ladner, "A New Hope on the Apache Reservation," Chamber Business News, April 5, 2019, https://chamberbusinessnews.com/2019/04/05/column-a-new-hope-on-the-apache-reservation/.

2. A more detailed discussion of this concept can be found at Matthew Ladner, "The Next Big Thing Is Getting Smaller," Arizona Charter Schools Association, August 6, 2020, https://azcharters.org/2020/08/06/the-next-big-thing-is-getting-smaller/.

Re-Prioritize Basic Skills and Technical Training for High School Graduates

Wayne D. Lewis Jr.

A public education system's effectiveness should be based primarily on whether graduates have been equipped to be productive workers following program completion. Otherwise, neither the system nor the completion certificate (diploma) is worth the tax dollars spent. As Kentucky's education commissioner, I found it woefully apparent that despite schools' and policymakers' best intentions, too many students who earned high school diplomas in Kentucky's public schools lacked the minimum knowledge or skills to succeed in college or the workforce. College leaders across the state routinely said high school graduates were not prepared for credit-bearing coursework.

The evidence of their concerns was the less than half of Kentucky public high school graduates who met the state's relatively low benchmarks for college readiness in reading and mathematics. But the even bigger problem for the state was the tens of thousands of high-wage, high-demand jobs that went unfilled, month after month, because not enough Kentuckians had the skills and credentials required to fill those jobs—despite the state's high school graduation rate of over 90 percent annually.

According to state longitudinal data, less than two-thirds of Kentucky's public high school graduates immediately matriculate into postsecondary education or training of some sort,[1] and the majority of those students drop out of college or training before earning any credential—such as a certificate, diploma, two-year degree, or four-year degree.[2] These graduates were more likely to have met or exceeded the state's watered-down readiness benchmarks. The state's labor force and economic data show that simply having a high school diploma without basic skills or preparation for the workforce is not enough to keep graduates out of poverty. In Kentucky and nationwide, graduates without a postsecondary credential of some kind are much less likely to be gainfully employed and much more likely to live near or below the poverty line.

These educational shortcomings are neither new nor isolated to Kentucky. In the early 1980s, Michael Bernick reported on recent high school graduates in San Francisco who struggled to independently complete applications for job-training programs and could not demonstrate reading and mathematics skills at the ninth-grade level.[3] As far back as the 1960s, one-fifth of high school graduates nationally applying to the armed services were denied entrance because they could not pass qualifying tests of basic academic skills.[4] But the stakes for students exiting high schools today without skills have become exponentially higher.

Many jobs that once existed for low-skill workers no longer exist. Technology, automation, artificial intelligence, and societal change are accelerating the elimination of low-skill jobs. In April 2019, Walmart announced it would be adding thousands of robots to its stores across the US, taking on tasks including scrubbing floors, scanning shelves, and even sorting boxes as they arrive at stores. Amazon now has more than 200,000 robots at work in its warehouses. Both

McDonald's and Wendy's have invested heavily in kiosks in their restaurants' lobbies, replacing the once solely human task of taking customer orders.

These shifts are happening in the retail sector, advanced manufacturing, and health care. Robots are not only cleaning floors and taking inventory but also conducting some of the most delicate human surgeries ever attempted. Meanwhile, American high schools continue to graduate students without basic skills in reading and math or a certification or skill that makes them valuable in the 21st-century economy.

While there is no simple solution to the long-standing American education problems of social promotion, watered-down curriculum and expectations, and secondary school experiences that are misaligned with the realities of postsecondary education and the workforce, some commonsense measures should be championed by conservatives and implemented in every state to make the high school diploma more meaningful.

Requiring Demonstration of Basic Skills

Social promotion, particularly in American high schools, has ruined the lives of untold numbers of young people. Graduating students who are functionally illiterate and innumerate are set up for failure. While some states and school districts celebrate their soaring high school graduation rates, thousands of students annually receive high school diplomas without having basic skills. In every state, minimum high school graduation requirements should in some way assure that students receiving diplomas have basic skills in reading and mathematics, and schools and adults should be held accountable for ensuring it.

Diversifying Secondary School Curriculum and Program Offerings

High school curriculum and programs should be just as diverse as students' interests and aptitudes. All students should be required to achieve basic competence in reading, mathematics, and citizenship, but schools should also provide increased options and flexibility for students to pursue academic and technical programs aligned with their educational and career aspirations. For some students, a college-preparatory curriculum—including higher-level courses in mathematics and lab sciences, Advanced Placement (AP), and introductory postsecondary academic coursework—is most appropriate. For other students, appropriate secondary programs include pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship experiences and preparation for certifications in automotive technology, manufacturing, or the skilled trades.

States' school accountability systems and graduation requirements should equally weigh academic and technical pathways. School districts should develop and make these program options available to students, and policymakers should ensure that archaic funding and attendance-zone policies do not prevent students from accessing programs that align with their interests and aspirations.

Prioritizing Career and Technical Education

Career and technical education (CTE) programs continue to be regarded and funded like an afterthought in too many states and school districts, when, in reality, CTE programs should be central to public education. Given that high school should prepare graduates for postsecondary education, training, and the workforce, CTE programs that provide students with in-demand technical skills and industry-recognized certifications should be as highly prized as AP coursework is.

In fact, regarding funding priority, CTE programs should be prioritized over AP coursework—not because these programs are more important, but because they have been underused and defunded for the past two decades. CTE programs in health care, advanced manufacturing, and IT touch and benefit a much larger number of students than college-prep coursework does, and workforce demand in technical areas requires that we prepare many more students for middle-skill technical jobs.

Aligning Secondary Curriculum and Expectations with Postsecondary Realities

Far too often, secondary curriculum and expectations for secondary students are misaligned with postsecondary realities and expectations. This misalignment includes college freshmen entering first-year writing courses with no familiarity with Modern Language Association or American Psychological Association style guidelines and secondary CTE programs that culminate with school-designed and -recognized certifications that have no meaning or value in the workforce. If high school diplomas or high school itself are ever to become meaningful again, secondary programs and expectations must truly prepare students for what comes next in their academic and professional lives.

Too many educators, leaders, and policymakers have prioritized maximizing points in school accountability systems and inflating high school graduation rates with little regard for how those decisions affect students' lives. We must end the pervasive school accountability gamesmanship that puts too many high school graduates on the fast track to poverty, dependency, or prison.

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Rethink the School Day and Year

Holly Kuzmich

COVID-19 is laying bare two realities in education. Over the past several decades, we have been warned that schools are not making the most of the time they have with students. Despite those warnings, little has changed. Additionally, the school calendar is not friendly to working families. As the education community plans for the upcoming school year amid a pandemic, these two issues are even more apparent. This is the moment to imagine and move toward a new vision of school that rethinks how schools use time.

The school schedule in the United States—for both the school day and school year—has been around for more than 100 years with few changes. School calendars across the country average out to approximately 180 days per year and between 6.5 and seven hours of school per day. Most school schedules provide long summer breaks, to the point that it has become a cultural norm. The tourism and summer camp industries flex their muscles to keep it that way as well.

In 1983, when *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released, researchers questioned instructional time in American schools compared to other countries. The report recommended districts look at modifying their traditional school schedules to increase student achievement.[1] Thirty-seven years later, there is little to show for it.

Meanwhile, our students are lagging academically. According to the Nation's Report Card, only 35 percent of fourth graders were proficient in reading and only 41 percent were proficient in math on the 2019 assessment, and achievement gaps remain.[2] Kids not on grade level often need more instructional time. And kids often lose ground academically over the summer—often referred to as the "summer slide"—which is an even more significant issue in 2020 because of the pandemic's effect on school.

Low-income families bear the brunt of this challenge. When students are behind, higher-income families fill the gaps with tutors and additional classes after school and during the summer. They can also provide other extracurricular activities that support their kids' growth and development, such as music, sports, and summer camps.

This pandemic is also showing how the school schedule puts families in a bind. We often think of school in the context of its role in supporting kids academically and socially, but school is also childcare. Disruptions to the schedule this year because of COVID-19 have made that abundantly clear. Families with a parent who stays at home and does not work can more easily accommodate kids learning from home at least some of the time. Families with a parent working remotely at home have a harder time but can find ways to manage. But families with a single parent or two parents who work and cannot do so remotely are in a tough spot.

The pandemic is exacerbating this lack of alignment between the school schedule and the needs of kids and families, which have changed significantly over time. More parents—especially moms—are working. Today, 72 percent of moms of school-age children are employed, compared with about 50 percent in 1968, and 80 percent of working moms are employed full-time. Nearly 90 percent of dads with school-age children are employed full-time.[3] So when school ends at 3:00 p.m., working parents face a practical challenge of what to do with their kids while they are still working.

While different school districts have tweaked the schedule some over the years, those tweaks have been fairly minor. When revisions have happened to the school day or year, they've been driven by the school

community, not the needs of kids and families. In looking at this issue for the past decade, I have found little information that came from asking parents what would be helpful to them.

It's time that changed. Rethinking time in school to better meet the needs of kids and parents aligns with principles that conservatives believe are important. We are reticent to believe that one-size-fits-all prescriptions meet the needs of a diverse student population. We aim to be pro-parent and pro-student and less beholden to unions, which can hamstring flexibility and innovation. We believe in the dignity of work in adding value to people's lives and to our society.

I would make the following recommendations, knowing that we need to wait to implement most of these changes until we get through the 2020–21 school year with so many urgent challenges because of COVID-19.

As a starting point, states, districts, and charter management organizations should proactively survey parents to understand whom they are serving and what their specific needs are. Little information is available about the real needs of working parents as it relates to school schedules.

State officials should look at their state laws and regulations regarding the school year. School year calendars are sometimes restricted to particular start dates, which can make more flexible scheduling impossible.

We need to reimagine how time is used within the 6.5 to seven hours that kids are in school. That could mean different formulations than the traditional classroom, with some hybrid of direct instruction by the teacher and some work online during the school day. This would also allow for kids to work at their own pace, moving toward a competency-based system of learning rather than the traditional seat-time model. Kids could take more time in the areas they need it and move to advanced coursework when appropriate.

Schools can also rethink how they become a hub of services in the community. That means bringing more after-school and enrichment activities into the school building itself, even if those services are provided by other organizations. We can also think about using the physical schools for other uses and longer in the school day and year, instead of letting them sit idle for hours and months, especially during the summer.

As state leaders identify innovative models for using school time, they can use existing funding streams to support innovative school schedules. Title I, Part A dollars from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and 21st Century Community Learning Center funding can be used for these purposes. Partnerships with local nonprofit organizations to colocate existing services in schools should be explored more fully as a way to make extended-day programs available without adding significant new costs.

These changes could go a long way in better meeting the needs of kids, especially low-income children, and of working parents. With all the pandemic is showing us in terms of new models of schools, it's an opportune time to rethink and reimagine what could be. Big structural changes like this will be difficult and won't happen overnight. But we also shouldn't accept that the way we've been doing it for the past 100 years is getting us where we need to be as a nation.

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A Three-Year Bachelor's Degree

Michael B. Poliakoff

A college that has failed to answer candidly the question "What does it mean to be a graduate of this institution?" is guilty of malfeasance. If the faculty, administration, and governing board can promulgate only vague platitudes about discovery, friendships formed, global awareness, and the like, *then it is stealing money, time, and opportunities from students, their families, and taxpayers*.

The university must build that core body of knowledge and aptitudes that an institution's academic experts deem central—indeed, indispensable—to being a college-educated person. And if there is a benefit for higher education that can come from COVID-19, then it might just be some soul-searching and even repentance about what we have been buying with the second-highest expenditure per student in the world.

College students, regardless of their majors or professional programs, need a rigorous liberal arts core curriculum. That curriculum must efficiently develop college-level skills and knowledge in the arts and sciences disciplines that are necessary for success in a dynamic and demanding workplace and for a lifetime of informed citizenship. Individual and national success will hinge on mathematical, scientific, economic, and historical literacy; excellent writing skills; and the ability to navigate foreign languages.

Students also need a faster track for their undergraduate education that gets them into the workforce quickly and saddles them with less debt. That is why everyone, especially conservatives, should support reestablishing a solid core curriculum, taking an ax to the vast menu of distribution requirements and electives, and shortening the undergraduate degree from 120 credit hours to 90 credit hours—allowing determined students to graduate in three, rather than four, years.

A good core curriculum should be built around requirements, not a cafeteria line of choices. It needs to include formal expository writing, literature, a college-level mathematics course, a natural science course, an economics course, a survey in US history or government, and three semesters of a foreign language. At three credit hours per course, students can complete this rigorous core curriculum in 27 credit hours, less than one-third of the 90-credit-hour degree. This would give students the foundational knowledge necessary for career and citizenship before they pursue a major and gain in-depth mastery in a discipline, all while graduating in three years and leaving college with less debt.

Compressing the time to degree would limit the need for students to take unnecessary classes. Farewell and good riddance to fluff courses such as "Vampires: History of the Undead,"[1] "Monsters of Japan,"[2] "Social Media and Hashtag Activism,"[3] and "The World According to Pixar."[4] (Note: These course titles come straight from college catalogs of the past several years. And they count for credit, often general education or distributional credit.) Most young people already know how to use the internet for such distractions. They don't need an expensive college to help them explore pop culture.

When an institution allows such curricular bloat, typically there will be many sections that are underenrolled. The institution that eliminates such an unwholesome intellectual diet can reckon on saving nearly 20 percent of its instructional budget.[5] It can cost-effectively replace this treacle and cotton candy with multiple sections of fully enrolled, thoughtfully designed core courses. It thereby saves scarce (now, possibly nonexistent) funds and educates far more rigorously.

For the record, there is no federal statute requiring that a bachelor's degree take 120 credit hours. Several of the federally empowered regional accreditors, which control access to federal financial aid, have stipulated 120 hours. These entities need to back off on both financial and intellectual grounds.

A three-year undergraduate degree has a strong precedent. Much of Europe offers three-year bachelor's degrees. Of course, the European model and ours are quite different, especially given the uneven world of American secondary education. But by instituting a solid core curriculum, students can develop the collegiate skills they need, focus on their liberal arts programs, and be ready to choose a major meaningfully.

In the best of all worlds, professors will move beyond the turf wars of departments to re-create a true academic community, in which their signature will be graduates who have grown through shared intellectual experiences that correspond to the challenges they will meet as fellow citizens and in the workforce. Employers will be happier, graduates will bear less debt, and institutions will run with greater cost-effectiveness and the satisfaction of knowing they are fulfilling their calling as educators and mentors.

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Hybrid College

Hanna Skandera

The American dream—the belief that anyone is capable of upward mobility and a better life than the one in which they were born—is in jeopardy. According to Harvard economist Raj Chetty, American families are experiencing reduced upward mobility across generations. As Gareth Cook wrote in the *Atlantic*:

> In one early study, [Chetty] showed that children born in 1940 had a 90 percent chance of earning more than their parents, but for children born four decades later, that chance had fallen to 50 percent, a toss of a coin.[1]

Today, the American dream is at risk, and education is the key to reversing the trajectory of upward mobility, imparting what it means to be a good citizen, and making the American dream a dream to, once again, be grasped.

To propel society toward a better future for all, we must refocus on the following.

- **A Flexible Education System That Is Not Entrenched in Existing Silos.** Our rigid system does not meet the needs of all students, resulting in increasing numbers of youth disconnected from the system entirely. Even among those who make it to college, less than 75 percent persist beyond the first year.[2] Further, completion rates for low-income students average below 10 percent,[3] and 70 percent of students who leave college can't go back because of work or family commitments.[4]

- **A Workforce Where Supply Meets Demand.** Before the coronavirus, the number of job openings in the US surpassed the number of people available and qualified to fill them, and only 11 percent of business leaders strongly agreed that college graduates have the skills employers need.[5]

- **A System Design That Keeps the End in Mind.** With our current system, 20 percent of young millennials have over $50,000 in student debt,[6] expecting to pay it off in their 50s, which hinders their opportunity for upward mobility. Further, only 26 percent of US adults strongly agree that their education is relevant to their work and day-to-day life.[7]

Hybrid college is a catalyst to rethink how we use key leverage points—time, talent, technology, and funding—to smooth the transitions between K–12, higher education, and work. It allows for blurring the lines, softening our existing silos, and creating a student-centered strategy designed with the end in mind.

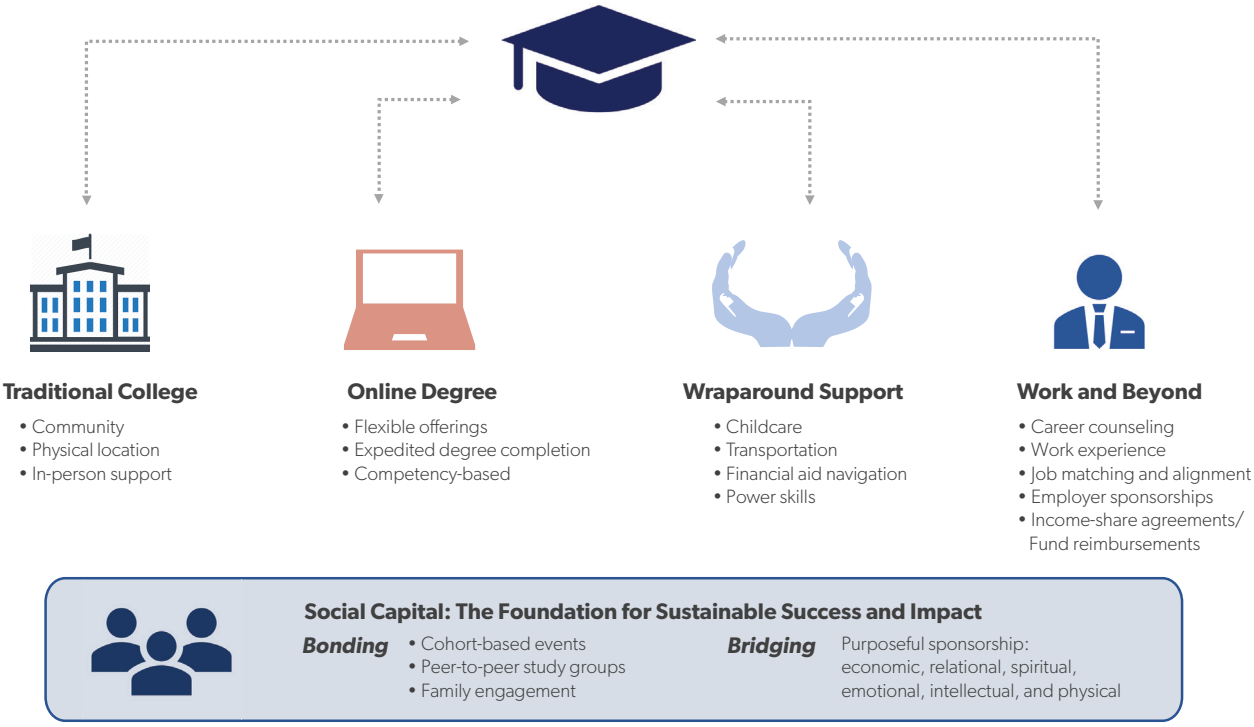
Hybrid College and Education Transformation

Hybrid college redesigns the pathways among education, work, and life so that all people, especially those most at risk, can achieve lifelong upward economic mobility and be more engaged citizens—the American dream. This solution is threefold:

1. Enroll more students in affordable college,

2. Graduate those students at dramatically higher rates, and

Figure 1. The Hybrid College Model



Source: Author.

3. Align certificates, credentials, and degrees with regional employment needs, closing the supply/demand gap.

The hybrid college concept combines the flexibility of an online degree and credential offerings with in-person support and community building (Figure 1). To ensure success for all students, the programming provides hands-on career counseling and work experience and enables connections to wraparound supports, such as childcare and transportation, to maximize access. Students attend weekly coaching meetings and additional community events with peers in person. Substantially reduced facility and in-person faculty costs allow for a more affordable and successful experience.

With the hybrid college model, pathways are nonlinear and dynamic, and opportunity seekers weave together education and work throughout their lives while sharing responsibility for financing with future employers and being more aligned to evolving employer and industry needs. And perhaps most importantly, students can begin their college career while enrolled in the K–12 pipeline, allowing for a seamless transition before they are lost in the shuffle of the broader system.

Flexibility is a cornerstone of this solution. The hybrid online format enables students to attend class from any location, and the asynchronous structure provides for flexible scheduling. The goal in this competency-based approach is mastery. Support from coaches and peers is provided through a cohort format, alongside teaching the power skills needed (aka "soft skills") for career attainment and advancement. Further, it allows students to stay in their communities and remain with or near family and job responsibilities. Overall, this solution embraces the idea that students can and should have responsibility for their

own learning, and education offerings must adapt accordingly.

Startup endeavors such as PelotonU, College Unbound, and Duet have seen early success.[8] Out-of-pocket costs for students are more affordable, typically under $7,000 per year. College Unbound and PelotonU have first-year persistence rates greater than 75 percent and graduation rates above 80 percent.[9] PelotonU's graduates experienced an average wage gain of $18,324, and 74 percent of Duet's graduates are making more than $36,000 per year.

Expanded hybrid colleges across the country could transform the education system and dramatically improve crucial outcomes. Persistence in postsecondary settings and completion rates of low-income students would increase, while student debt decreases. These indicators often result in increased employment at a living wage, which will help the community as a whole.

As previously mentioned, this model has emerged through startup endeavors across the country. However, policymakers can facilitate growth of this model to improve outcomes for students. For example, funding could be aligned to incentivize persistence and completion rates, and further flexibility could be given to Pell Grants to accommodate students pursuing various pathways. Pell Grants could be adjusted to allow for the eligibility for short-term programs, increased grant amounts, and flexibility with funding. States should consider enabling financial aid to include adult learners and part-time students to meet the needs of all prospective students.

In addition, redesigning accreditation will be important. Policy could enable college credit for work experience and expand early college high schools to smooth the transition and likelihood for stronger results. Ultimately, policymakers should reflect on whether the existing measures of student success represent those that we value today in an evolving landscape around work and employability, as the success of this model requires reorienting our mindset on what constitutes education and what we say is important.

The need for a hybrid college solution today is critical. The coronavirus has only accelerated demand. With the hybrid college, we can realign systems to meet our students' needs, creating greater academic and economic outcomes, greater civic participation, and less reliance on government assistance.

The unprecedented situation triggered by COVID-19 has inspired an incredible opportunity to perpetuate and strengthen the values underlying the American dream. To do so, we have to commit to reversing the opportunity mobility trend and reviving the role and purpose of education. It is fundamentally American to seek increased economic and opportunity mobility. The hybrid college is an innovative and responsive redesign, essential to achieve the desired outcome of engaged citizens, economic prosperity, and a better life for all Americans—simply put, the American dream.

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Part II: Civic and Philanthropic Leadership

Conservatives by nature are skeptical of heavy-handed government and instead prefer organic, democratic change. This is especially true in an education system defined by an already bloated bureaucracy. In this spirit, the following reports confront some of the most pressing issues of the day through civic initiative and philanthropic leadership rather than government dollars and a bureaucratic hand.

Incentivize Individual Agency to Achieve Upward Mobility

Ian Rowe

The promise of upward mobility across generations has been fundamental to the American story since its inception. Yet a range of studies have identified "toxic levels of wealth inequality," particularly between black and white Americans, as vibrant proof of America's legacy of racial oppression.[1] According to the 2016 Survey of Consumer Finances,[2] the median African American family possessed approximately $17,000 in net wealth, while the median white family had amassed $171,000 in net wealth. In a recent Goldman Sachs research brief, Kerwin K. Charles sized the problem by stating that the "typical Black household in America today is estimated to have somewhere between one-tenth and one-fourteenth the wealth of the typical white household."[3]

A range of policies to close the racial wealth gap have been proposed, including baby bonds, universal basic income, and trillions of dollars of cash reparations paid to black American descendants of slavery. But one solution has been willfully excluded from consideration: individual agency. The circular argument goes that, unless institutional barriers are removed, black Americans are trapped in a perpetual cycle of economic victimhood. The Institute for Policy Studies notes, "Changes in individual behavior will not close the racial wealth divide, only structural systemic policy change can do that."[4]

In *What We Get Wrong About Closing the Racial Wealth Gap*, William Darity Jr. et al. assert, "There are no actions that black Americans can take unilaterally that will have much of an effect on reducing the racial wealth gap."[5] *New York Times* reporter Nikole Hannah Jones argues:

> None of the actions we are told black people must take if they want to "lift themselves" out of poverty and gain financial stability—not marrying, not getting educated, not saving more, not owning a home—can mitigate 400 years of racialized plundering.[6]

Even Oprah Winfrey—whose own story of escaping poverty and abuse has been an inspiration to millions—describes an American "caste system" in which "white people . . . no matter where they are on the rung, or the ladder of success, they still have their whiteness . . . which [creates] an advantage, no matter what."[7]

Imagine you are a 12-year-old black boy living in the South Bronx, with aspirations to work hard to achieve the American dream. Yet you are repeatedly told there is nothing you can do individually to achieve that goal. Imagine further that this message comes from adults who claim to advocate on your behalf, and yet they tell you it is pointless to even try, simply because you are black and have no individual ability to close the racial wealth divide.

As someone who has run public charter schools in low-income communities in the Bronx, I know how debilitating such a narrative can be for a student's hopes and aspirations. Rather than helping that young man develop personal agency and an understanding of the behaviors most likely to propel him into success, this message will only teach what psychologists term "learned helplessness."

Not only does this notion that individual effort is worthless depress human motivation, but it is also demonstrably wrong. There *are* decisions within the control of black kids—and children of all races—that

Figure 1. Median Net Worth of Two-Parent Black Households vs. Single-Parent White Households with Children

Note: Households headed by a widowed parent were excluded from analyses.
Source: Author's calculations from Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, "Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF)," 2016, https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scfindex.htm.

increase their likelihood to improve their economic outcomes within a single generation and thus their ability to transfer wealth across generations.

For example, while strengthening family structure would not single-handedly close the racial wealth gap, it is a controllable factor that heavily influences economic outcomes. The same 2016 Survey of Consumer Finances that shows the average black family has 10 times less wealth than the average white family shows the *reverse* when family structure is considered. Indeed, black households headed by two married parents have *twice* the median net worth of the typical white, single-parent household (Figure 1).

The 2017 report *The Millennial Success Sequence* finds that a stunning 91 percent of black people avoided poverty when they reached their prime young adult years (age 28–34), if they followed the "success sequence"—that is, they earned at least a high school degree, worked full-time, and married before having any children, in that order.[8] Raj Chetty et al. studied the intergenerational mobility of more than 40 million children and their parents.[9] They found that *hyper-local* factors—most notably measures of father presence and marriage rates in a given location—drive upward (or downward) mobility and thus the intergenerational transfer of wealth.

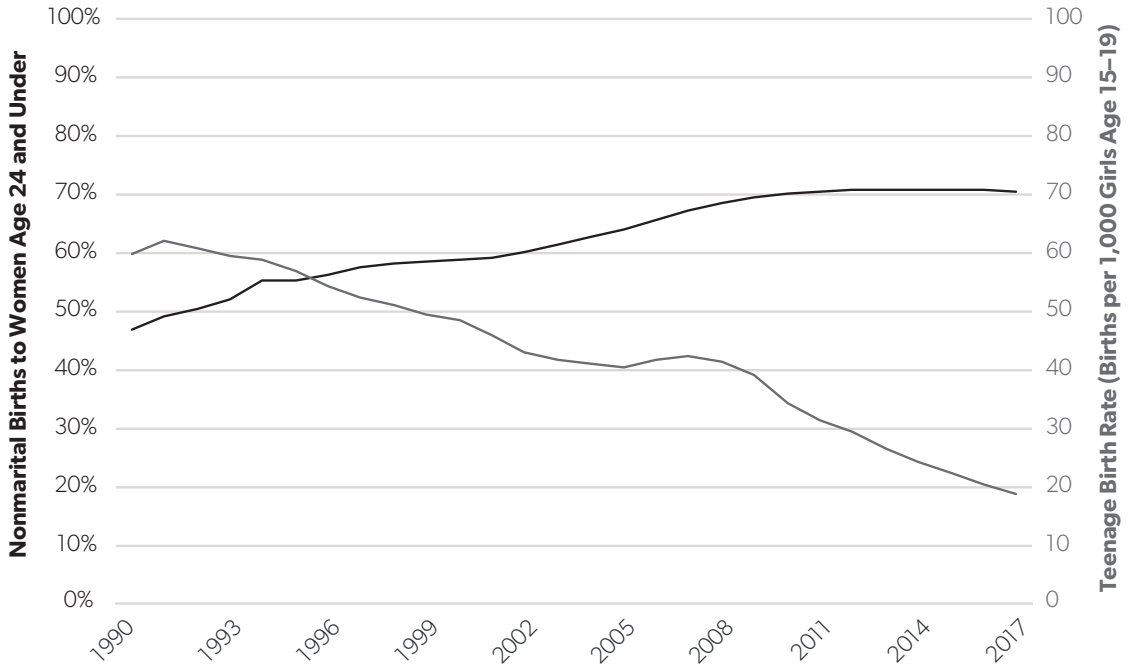
Despite these compelling data, many young adults are taking divergent paths into young adulthood. As teen birth rates have fallen, the share of all babies born outside of marriage has risen from about 5 percent in the 1960s to a "new normal" of 40 percent today.[10] For millennials, there has been a steep increase in the share of nonmarital births among women age 20–24 as hundreds of thousands of young women postpone childbearing until after their teenage years but not until after they have married.

Figure 2 delineates the nonmarital birth share for women of all races under age 25, but it is also useful to look at how this statistic breaks down across races. In 2018, 91 percent of all babies born to black women under age 25 were outside of marriage, and 61 percent of babies born to white women were outside of marriage. Furthermore, approximately 41 percent of these babies were the mother's second child or greater.[12]

Widely accepted research shows that single parenthood among young adults is one of the top predictors of child poverty, school suspensions, incarceration, and educational disadvantage.[13] Unmarried young mothers are far more likely to experience high levels of partnership instability and family complexity, each of which is associated with poorer child well-being and intergenerational transmission of *disadvantage*.

If we really want to help young people break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, we need a serious effort to reframe the decisions governing passage into young adulthood. In light of this, educators, venture capitalists, and philanthropists should work together to develop and pilot evidence-based curricula that help young people build agency by teaching the success sequence in schools, create greater access

Figure 2. Nonmarital Births to Women Age 24 and Under vs. Teenage Births to Girls Age 15–19



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Vital Statistics Reports.[11]

to private capital to encourage entrepreneurship and wealth creation, and organize social and mass media campaigns to normalize a new set of behavioral expectations around family formation.

Building Evidence-Based Curricula

Inspiring a new era of agency and opportunity among our most vulnerable children will require schools to start speaking honestly with students about the steps that will help them find success in life. We must develop and pilot evidence-based curricula that help young people understand the likely rewards and consequences associated with different series of life decisions, such as teaching the success sequence to kids in school.

In a recent survey commissioned by the Heritage Foundation, 72 percent of parents and 60 percent of school board members agreed that schools should explicitly teach that following the success sequence will make them more likely to avoid poverty.[14] Parents want their children to learn about pathways to power in their lives, and educators and philanthropists can step in to meet this need.

Improve Access to Private Capital

Young people of all races must learn the concept of "earned success," the notion that money generated through hard work is much more rewarding than money simply given to us.[15] Schools can encourage entrepreneurship by building awareness of the new forms of venture capital dedicated to changing the face of entrepreneurship.

An excellent example of how we might promote this is Harlem Capital Partners, an early-stage venture capital firm on a mission to invest in 1,000 minority and female founders over the next 20 years. Another is the New Voices Fund, a $100 million initiative created to invest in and empower female entrepreneurs of color that was recently launched by African American leaders such as Richelieu Dennis.

Social and Mass Media Campaign

Finally, we should launch a national campaign aimed at normalizing honest conversations about the timing of family formation. Both the AEI/Brookings Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity[16] and Harvard University's Closing the Opportunity Gap Initiative[17] strongly recommend large-scale marketing campaigns around this model. Such a campaign would not deny the existence of discrimination along racial lines and other barriers to animating the steps in the success sequence, but rather would describe what is possible for children even in the face of structural barriers.

There is no guarantee in life, but at a time when a global pandemic is highlighting entrenched and growing inequities, depriving young people of the very information that could empower them to succeed is irresponsible. Messaging that individual effort doesn't matter anyway is cruel.

To increase upward mobility and close the racial wealth gap for the next generation, young people of all races must adopt a new cultural norm around education, work, entrepreneurship, and responsible parenthood. As educators, we have a moral imperative to help our students develop a sense of hope and agency in their life—teaching them that they have the power to be masters of their own destiny, even when they face structural barriers.

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School and Community Career Pathways Models for Building Social Capital

Bruno V. Manno

From 1910 to 1940, a grassroots effort in America called the high school movement led to a "spectacular educational transformation" in this country.[1] Enrollment of 18-year-olds grew from 19 percent to 71 percent, and graduation rates rose from 9 percent to more than 50 percent—lifting the US to the forefront of educational attainment in the world.

Even still, consumer data today from Gallup and Strada Education Network show that students are disappointed that their educational experiences are not preparing them for good jobs, and employers complain they cannot fill the jobs they have.[2]

One possible answer to both problems may lie in what seems to be a new high school movement: constructing school and community career pathways partnership models that integrate schools and students with employers and work. This approach creates new forms of social capital for young people by developing relationships that expand their community networks and lifetime access to opportunity and prepare them for life, work, and responsible citizenship.

Relationships are resources that can lead to developing and accumulating human capital and opportunity networks that are key to unlocking social mobility and opportunity. Many schools already foster the development of students' *bonding social capital* (creating group networks that not only satisfy the need to be with others like ourselves but also provide personal emotional support, companionship, and validation). But schools do not always succeed at helping students build *bridging social capital* (connections with individuals different than ourselves that expand knowledge, social circles, and resources across race, class, and religion). As Xavier de Souza Briggs says, bonding social capital is for "getting by," and bridging social capital is for "getting ahead" or "import clout."[3]

Conservatives should support expanding school and community career pathways partnership models to allow students to build the kind of bridging social capital necessary to unlock social mobility and become productive workers while in school.

A Pathways Partnership Expansion Framework

The Pathways to Prosperity Network, an alliance of more than 60 regional pathway programs across the country, has identified four aspects of career-focused pathway programs that should guide the expansion of these programs.

Sequenced Academic Curriculum. Programs should include requirements aligned with labor market needs (i.e., supply and demand in the community), a timeline guiding young people, and a genuine student career credential.

Introducing Students to Work and Careers No Later Than Middle School. Students should start with activities such as guest speakers and field trips

in middle school and then move to career exposure in high school through mentorships, internships, and work experiences. Work-based learning experience should be integrated into classroom discussions and challenge young people with real-world tasks that help them understand labor market demands. Discussions should include academic and technical knowledge and the "soft skills" needed for a career.

The Indispensable Role of Employers, Industry Associations, and Other Mediating Institutions. Employers and their affiliates must set program standards and define the skills and competencies students need to attain a certificate and employment. They should provide paid apprenticeships offering work experience and assist in assessing a young person's employment readiness. Other community groups should assist with convening, organizing, and planning and provide program and work placement navigation and social support services for students (and their families). Examples of intermediaries include community foundations, community colleges, chambers of commerce, private industry councils, the Salvation Army, and United Way.

Policy Leaders' Key Role in These Programs. Policies at the local, state, and federal levels create the framework that facilitates program expansion. The policy framework includes executive orders and directives by federal, state, or local governance entities. For example, a policy creating incentives for K–12, postsecondary, labor, and workforce groups to integrate distinct funding streams would allow for a new approach to financial support for pathways programs.

Partnership Model Examples

Career pathways partnership models can be structured in many ways in the above framework. Here are five.

District, Charter, and University Partnerships. Wiseburn Unified School District in Los Angeles County and its partner Da Vinci Charter School have more than 100 business and nonprofit partners offering students programs—including internships, mentorships, workshops, boot camps, and consultancies—with student mental health and counseling services. Students can also pursue associate or bachelor's degree programs through University of California, Los Angeles, Extension; El Camino College; or College for America.

In Boston, Match Charter Public School, in partnership with Duet and Southern New Hampshire University, assists students with college completion and career placement, including student coaching and mentoring and accredited associate and bachelor's degrees. The program includes comprehensive career services such as job searches and support through the hiring process for up to two years after graduation.

Catholic Schools and Corporate Partnerships. Cristo Rey is a network of 35 Catholic high schools in 22 states serving low-income, mostly minority students that integrates four years of academics with work experience through its Corporate Work Study Program. This nonprofit placement service works with more than 3,400 partners to situate students five days a month in an entry-level professional job. Students earn 60 percent of tuition through employment, with the balance coming from fundraising and a small family contribution.

Public-Private Partnerships. The Atlanta business community, Fulton County Schools, and Junior Achievement created a public-private partnership called 3-D Education. This project-based learning approach includes a six-week case study beginning in 11th grade that pairs students with coaches in off-campus industrial and professional settings.

Citywide Partnerships. In New Orleans, the education, business, and civic partnership YouthForce NOLA works with open enrollment charter high schools, offering career exposure and work experiences, soft-skills training, coaching for students, and paid student internships for seniors. This is followed

by 90 hours of work placement in a career pathway with opportunities including biology and health sciences, digital media and IT, and skilled crafts such as architecture and water management. It also has a family engagement program educating parents about the career pathways program.

Private Enterprise. In Indianapolis, Kenzie Academy is a venture-funded technology and apprenticeship program for students from varying backgrounds, including high school graduates, formerly incarcerated individuals, and those with master's degrees seeking new occupational opportunities. Students apprentice in Kenzie Studio, the company's consulting arm. To make the $24,000-a-year program accessible, students have an income share agreement delaying that payment until they have a job paying at least $40,000. Kenzie Academy partners with Butler University so students can receive a certificate from both organizations.

Conclusion

The 20th-century high school movement created a remarkable educational transformation in America. Today, we can advance a new high school movement that treats schools as formative institutions that build social capital for young people by integrating students with employers and work.

Programs like those detailed above help young people develop an occupational identity and vocational self that leads to adult success and a lifetime of opportunity. They place student activity, engagement, relationship building, and networking at the center of their design and use different approaches to develop habits of mind and habits of association in young people. They create new ways that K–12 education can develop an individual's talents to his or her full potential, increasing that person's ability to pursue opportunity over a lifetime. Finally, they catalyze the creation of high-opportunity communities. School and community career pathways partnership models ought to be replicated in more school districts, charter schools, and public-private settings.

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Campus Free Expression

AN INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH

Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill

Over the past few decades, conservatives have watched universities move away from encouraging and protecting a broad ideological spectrum of reasoned debate toward an ever-narrowing range of acceptable speech.

A 2020 report about one flagship public university illustrates the degree to which today's cancel culture chills open inquiry: 75 percent of self-identified conservative undergraduates and 26 percent of self-identified liberal undergraduates were concerned that what they said in an in-person classroom discussion would lower classmates' opinions of them, and 43 percent of self-identified conservatives and 10 percent of self-identified liberals were worried their classroom comments would be shared on social media.[1] While students fear each other, professors fear students' bias response complaints.[2] In addition to freedom of speech, freedoms of association and religion have also been chilled: Schools have banned single-sex organizations[3] and prohibited faith-based student organizations from setting rules for membership and leadership roles consistent with their beliefs,[4] and students have pushed others out of student government because of their religious beliefs.[5]

Conservatives have already taken meaningful steps to address this crisis. Conservative faculty members, with philanthropic support, have launched campus institutes to mentor young conservatives, create opportunities to hear viewpoints seldom heard on many campuses, and make campuses more congenial to viewpoint diversity. They've championed the Chicago principles—the free expression policy statement adopted by the University of Chicago in 2015[6]—and encouraged like-minded faculty to enter academic administration.[7] Republican lawmakers have been active, too: Since 2017, 20 states have adopted free speech legislation.[8]

But these approaches have limits. While campus institutes make space for conservative students, they do not touch the great majority who do not participate in their programs. The Chicago principles have been adopted by more than 75 schools, which is a great achievement, but it's still just a tiny fraction of the more than 2,800 four-year US colleges and universities. State free speech laws may eliminate some barriers to free expression, such as so-called "free speech zones," but cannot mandate true viewpoint diversity and open exchange. Frankly, conservatives have been limiting themselves by only playing an outsider's game, as lasting change comes from shifting the culture from within.

To build up a free expression culture at more schools, conservatives should look closely at schools that adopted significant free expression reforms under the leadership of nonconservative administrators. This begins by showing a willingness to move past the long-standing animosity between conservatives and the "liberal" institution of the university, lines that have certainly hardened in recent years and have always played well as a battle of us versus them.

Gettysburg College and Colgate University have adopted significant free expression reforms with wide campus support and engagement. In both cases, task forces with administrative, faculty, and student representation engaged in campus-wide consultations, hearings, and meetings. The process at both schools

was fractious but led to statements that were ratified by the student government, faculty, and trustees.[9] Both schools considered the Chicago principles but ultimately adopted statements that reflect their institutional history and culture.[10]

Notable is how conservatives succeeded in having their concerns heard and incorporated into the task forces' work. Jennifer Collins Bloomquist, associate provost for faculty development and leader of the task force at Gettysburg College, described how the task force changed her views.

> It became very, very clear to me that [conservative] students also feel minoritized because of their viewpoints. And I think that when we talk about diversity, it is so easy for us to only talk about people who are non-majority identified, and to completely discredit the fact that on campuses like Gettysburg College we have some students with viewpoints that are not in alignment with some of the other people on campus, and those viewpoints also need to be considered when we are talking about diversity of thought.[11]

Conservatives might suppose that the difficulties in fostering viewpoint diversity and the chilling of conservative speech should have been known before, but the hard work of institution building through a free expression task force changed perceptions, made new advocates for viewpoint diversity, and led to statements that are now being used to rewrite other campus policies and set metrics with which institutional success in promoting open inquiry and free expression are measured. These task forces and the statements they produced are thus reforming campus from the inside.

Conservatives need to engage in these task force reform processes at every step. This requires two things that conservatives have been reluctant to do.

First, they must embrace working with administrators. Conservatives have been reluctant to work with administrators because they're even more liberal-leaning than faculty are, as American Enterprise Institute Visiting Scholar Samuel J. Abrams has demonstrated.[12] But, if conservatives want to do more than work on the fringes of campuses, they must commit to working with those tasked with implementing policies that apply to every member of the campus community. They may share more than they think with these administrators, who want to preserve the nature of these institutions as freethinking spaces.

Second, it requires engaging with campus discussions about diversity and inclusion. A 2020 Gallup Knight Foundation survey documents students' belief in the trade-off between free speech and diversity and inclusion: 76 percent believe these values are at least occasionally in conflict.[13] Conservatives should address marginalized communities' concerns by drawing on examples of highly controversial speech, protest, and expression that were essential to the civil rights movement and women's suffrage and by looking at how current issues such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo make the case for the central value of free expression in campus life.

As the examples of Gettysburg College and Colgate University illustrate, some campuses have administrators with varied ideological outlooks but a shared commitment to free expression who are ready to undertake the hard institution-building work of creating new free expression statements and policies. Conservatives who want to create campus-wide reforms that support free expression must add this insider approach to their strategies for reform.

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Campus Free Speech

A CULTURAL APPROACH

Adam Kissel

A survey of 20,000 college students shows that, in 2020, large proportions of students in America self-censor, do not feel empowered to share or discuss controversial topics, and see violence against offensive speakers as sometimes justified. A large proportion also report that while their colleges say they support free speech, administrators would be more likely to punish an offensive speaker than protect the person's right to speak.[1]

Outside pressure on colleges tends to be resented, and while it may change a college's policies, it does not change a culture of self-censorship and oppression of disfavored views on campus. Legislation, lawsuits, and enforcement of the law have their place. Without internal cultural change, however, conservatives will continue to correctly see most of higher education as inhospitable to viewpoint diversity.

Free speech and community values can thrive together on a campus that takes an educational and scientific approach to addressing disfavored expression. Instead of disciplinary or community sanctions, a culture of empowerment, self-determination, and personal responsibility can prepare students for the rough-and-tumble world after college.

Iron Sharpens Iron

The minimum requirement for campus free speech, which many public colleges nevertheless violate, is not to punish constitutionally protected expression. Redressing such violations is important but inadequate. Likewise, reforming speech codes and issuing statements about free speech have value but do not prevent overzealous administrators and campus police from oppressing disfavored expression.

Furthermore, as John Stuart Mill argued in *On Liberty*, negative social sanction against minority expression and ways of living can also be oppressive.[2] Social sanction is often legal but can be immoral and unwise. Severe social sanction is particularly unwise on a college campus, where a core community value is education rather than punishment.

A culture of oppression goes beyond shout downs, removal of posters, vandalism, and dis-invitations. Administrative statements that "this view has no place here" are the opposite of toleration, diversity, and inclusion. Tendentious cries of "sexism," "white supremacy," and other epithets also tend to wildly misrepresent innocent speech, and such allegations shut down productive conversation and diminish the intellectual community. Students self-censor rather than suffer misrepresentation of their sincerely expressed views and the ostracism that follows from claims that these views have "no place" in a marketplace of ideas.

Instead, to promote community norms while tolerating the free expression of minority opinions, a light touch focused on education and a scientific approach is best.

A scientific approach begins with intellectual humility, the idea that everything is always up for discussion or revisiting. This "liberal science" approach, articulated well by Jonathan Rauch, is particularly well suited to a liberal arts college.[3] Even where the science is likely settled, college-level education helps a

student understand why something is likely true. The same is true for moral values. We all know murder is bad, but moral reasoning helps us articulate why and think through complex cases.

A light-touch educational approach focused on an individual's moral and intellectual formation is consistent with the conservative values of personal responsibility, self-determination, and community norms. When a student expresses a disfavored view, a simple Socratic approach can be extremely effective: "Why did you say that? Is that statement really consistent with your other views and values and your religious tradition? What would your mother say if she heard you say that?"

This simple strategy faces challenges in the current higher education ecosystem. Many students come to college unprepared for such conversations. All too often, residence-life administrators harm instead of help as true facilitators. Faculty members and curricula often fail to educate intolerant students to listen well, read honestly, and converse more reasonably. Deans and senior administrators often fail to model toleration or an educational, scientific approach when a fringe mob cries for punishment of a speaker. Admission offices are unlikely to weed out—and in many cases seem to encourage admission of—students with a tendency to blindly pursue social justice rather than approach college as a place to rethink and either deepen or change their beliefs.

Effective Cultural Reform

With all this in mind, a conservative approach can improve a college's culture to promote free expression for all students. Leadership from the college or university president and perhaps the board of trustees or regents may be necessary to implement the following reforms.

Reform Admissions. Applicants without intellectual humility or who cannot develop it quickly are not ready for intellectual pursuits. Applicants who appear likely to become the fringe students who take over buildings, shout down speakers, argue that violence against offensive speakers is justified, and so on should be screened out until they do not present a significant risk of unlawful conduct against the campus community.

Reform Residence Life. In colleges with on-campus housing, administrators spring into action and encourage Stasi-like reporting on one's neighbors whenever there is an expression of so-called bias.[4] Instead, administrators should remind students to address "bad" speech with "better" speech and to intellectually challenge one another rather than polarize and ostracize around factions.

Reform the Curriculum. Students deserve an education that prepares them for life off campus in a diverse, free society. The relatively small number of liberal arts colleges and the similar programs at prestigious universities that produce the majority of American leaders scarcely address civic, intellectual, and moral virtues through curriculum. Courses about American culture that do attempt to "raise consciousness" tend to teach resentment of America or promote the stereotypes of "cultural competence," teaching students to treat people as representatives of oppressor or oppressed identity groups. Cocurricular and extracurricular experiences do not fill the gap for many students but often reinforce cultural stereotypes as students band together in identity groups. To address these issues, professors, departments, and college-wide curriculum committees should revisit the formational elements of their work and redress deficiencies.

Train Administrators in Crisis Management on Matters of Free Expression. Too many deans and presidents react quickly and incorrectly when a controversy arises and then get a black eye for overreaching and must walk back their statements and actions, tail between their legs. In contrast, addressing such a crisis should employ the light-touch, educational, and scientific approach described here.

Model Good Behavior. In addition to reacting appropriately to speech representing a minority view,

all academic, administrative, and student groups can lead proactively by modeling and inviting healthy debate in conversations, classrooms, conferences, and other speaking events.

Conclusion

These reforms may take shape differently at each college, but they apply to any college that takes its educational role seriously. Ultimately, a culture of free expression, rather than self-censorship and ostracism, is most consistent with campus values of toleration, diversity, and inclusion.

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National Citizenship Curriculum

Chester E. Finn Jr.

It's time for conservatives to suppress their allergic reaction to "national curricula" long enough to encourage developing and deploying a national citizenship course.

You can exhale. I'm nowhere close to suggesting that the federal government should impose such a course on anyone, though I'd be fine with federal incentive dollars for states, districts, and individual (charter and private) schools that adopt it. Nor am I saying that government employees should develop the course—and that's in part because they've already supplied the basic framework for it: the excellent 100-question civics (and history) test that's part of the naturalization process for newcomers to the United States.[1]

As you surely know, would-be citizens must complete a multistep process[2] that includes answering—in person and orally; they're not multiple choice—10 questions selected from 100.

Please eyeball the questions yourself. While a handful strike me as only marginally important, in the main I'd say that if you know and can explain the answers to these 100 questions—which range across civics, American government, US history, a bit of geography, and even major holidays and symbols—you're ready to become a citizen (provided, of course, that you also meet the other requirements).

Yet we know from the revealing 2018 Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation survey that fewer than one in three adult Americans could pass such a test.[3] And the National Assessment of Educational Progress has recently reminded us that eighth graders' knowledge of civics (and US history and geography) remains dismal.[4]

Plans, task forces, road maps, and studies abound today for addressing the civics-ignorance problem that surrounds us, but so far nothing has worked.

The (conservative) Joe Foss Institute took a constructive step when its Civics Education Initiative urged states to require students to take and pass the citizenship test to graduate from high school. The institute describes this as "a first step to ensure all students are taught basic civics about how our government works, and who we are as a nation." It declares—correctly, in my view—that these are "concepts every student must learn to be ready for active, engaged citizenship."[5]

According to the institute, that ambitious venture has gained some good traction, with more than 30 states adopting some sort of civics proficiency requirement. However, it's not clear which, if any, of those states are actually using the 100-question US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) civics and history test, much less how they're evaluating student responses.

Regardless, while the initiative is indeed a worthy first step, adopting a civics proficiency requirement is not the same as preparing young people with the knowledge they need to pass it. What's needed—and to my knowledge not yet available anywhere—is a full-fledged curriculum by which schools and teachers can impart that knowledge in an orderly, systematic way. Federal officials already provide practice tests and some useful prep materials for wannabe citizens,[6] all of which could easily feed into a proper curriculum for school use.

So, why not create one and make it available to everyone? We could make it free, via open sourcing, both in hard copy and online, which is clearly needed more than ever during the virus crisis when schools

aren't even meeting. It should incorporate readings (original source materials), scope and sequence, lesson plans for teachers, sources for deeper learning, team projects, interim assessments, and more.

Why not, for that matter, create two or three such curricula, so there's one for middle schools, a more in-depth version for high schools, and maybe a simpler one for fourth or fifth grade? After all, everyone needs to learn this material in more than one way and more than once.

The elements of such a curriculum are all around us. At the advanced level, the College Board's Advanced Placement frameworks for US government and politics and US history are first-rate. Wonderful materials already exist, mostly for free, not just from USCIS but also from such worthy nonprofits as the Bill of Rights Institute, the Core Knowledge Foundation, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, iCivics, and the National Constitution Center.

An inevitable criticism of this idea will be that the citizenship test focuses primarily on knowledge and doesn't do much for the "skills," "dispositions," and "deeper learning" that many in civics education and social studies regard (with good reason) as equally important. Knowledge alone sometimes is derided as "simple memorization." So, maybe the national curriculum I'm suggesting should state upfront that it's about essential knowledge—and encourage others to augment it with the rest of what they believe is important for kids to learn in this realm.

Another likely criticism will be that the citizenship test emphasizes what might be termed America's "main story" and doesn't sufficiently highlight the "diversity" and "injustice" issues that are also part of the country's saga, which some contemporary educators (and politicians) prefer to dwell on. Again, the national curriculum should be candid about this: It will impart a raft of necessary information for American citizens but doesn't purport to encompass the whole story. It's more like the "vital core," the knowledge we should all possess no matter who we are, where we come from, or how different we are.

Whoever assembles the curriculum will have to navigate those shoals and more. So who should be entrusted with this delicate but profoundly important project? A team, obviously, one that will need practicing K–12 educators who know how a usable school curriculum looks and how to present it well. It will need experts to ensure that errors don't creep in and techies to ensure that it works online. It will need clever diggers to ferret out the materials and wise folks—with differing political views—to keep it balanced and lend it legitimacy. That creating such a curriculum should be a conservative priority doesn't mean progressives should shun the product. (They will undoubtedly want to augment it a bit more.)

Optimally, private philanthropy should pay for its creation, perhaps another combination of the Charles Koch Foundation and Hewlett Foundation—it's happened before—and maybe also the civic-minded Walton Family Foundation and Carnegie Corporation. Instead of anointing one group to construct it, maybe they should invite proposals, perhaps even make a dozen seed grants, and ultimately pick a winner, conceivably more than one. If one curriculum tied to the citizenship test is good, several would be better.

All are national in that they're open to the entire country, and the "end of course" exam already exists. It's up to states and localities whether to require its use. But I predict that plenty will.

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Three Perspective Shifts to Advance Choice

Robert C. Enlow and Jason Bedrick

Since the Ronald Reagan era, the conservative K–12 education agenda has centered on two ideas: choice and accountability. The time has come for conservatives to rethink how to put these principles into practice.

Initially, "choice" meant school vouchers, and "accountability" meant standards and high-stakes testing. Rather than leave education to politicians and bureaucrats, conservatives wanted to empower families to choose their children's schools—including religious ones—in a market. Meanwhile, educational excellence would be achieved by attaching rewards and penalties to performance as measured by standardized tests.

There was always a tension between choice and the regulatory view of accountability—and since the late 1990s, the conservative movement's emphasis was decidedly on the latter. The George W. Bush–era No Child Left Behind initiative paid lip service to choice but mainly used federal carrots and sticks to impose test-based accountability on states. When these reforms failed, accountability hawks doubled down via Common Core. The new regulations sparked a fierce backlash from parents and educators alike but failed yet again to move the needle. Tom Loveless recently concluded that despite billions spent on implementation, "the evidence suggests student achievement is, at best, about where it would have been if Common Core had never been adopted."[1]

Technocratic tinkering has failed to produce the promised results. It is time, instead, for conservatives to double down on choice. This approach is both more in line with conservative principles and a prerequisite for many conservative goals.

A central conservative insight is the essentiality of strong families to a well-ordered and free society. At their core, choice policies are family centered, empowering parents to choose learning environments that are the right fit for their children based on their intimate knowledge of their children's learning needs, social situation, and emotional well-being. Choice also respects families' freedom to choose schools in line with their values and faith traditions.

Conservatives have also long championed free markets over government bureaucracies as a means to address social challenges. As the American Enterprise Institute's Yuval Levin has argued, markets enable the channeling of "social knowledge from the bottom up" rather than "impos[ing] technical knowledge from the top down" via a Hayekian three-step process of "experimentation, evaluation, and evolution."

> Markets are ideally suited to following these steps. They offer entrepreneurs and businesses a huge incentive to try new ways of doing things (experimentation); the people directly affected decide which ways they like best (evaluation); and those consumer responses inform which ways are kept and which are left behind (evolution).
>
> This three-step process is at work well beyond the bounds of explicitly economic activity. It is how our culture learns and evolves, how norms and habits form, and how society as a general matter "decides" what to keep and what to change. It is an exceedingly effective way to balance stability with improvement, continuity with alteration, tradition with dynamism. It involves conservation of the core with

experimentation at the margins in an effort to attain the best of both.[2]

When education providers have the freedom to innovate and families exercise their freedom to choose the providers that work best for them, the entire system organically adapts to changing needs and circumstances.

Conservatives are right to pursue educational excellence and civic literacy, but achieving these ends cannot be successfully mandated from above. Fortunately, conservatives have important allies in the pursuit of these goals: families. It is no wonder then that research overwhelmingly finds that choice programs boost academic performance, raise graduation rates, and improve a host of civic outcomes such as civic knowledge, political tolerance, voluntarism, political participation, and patriotism.[3]

Choice in and of itself is not a panacea, but it is the surest path forward to achieve these ends. Nevertheless, conservatives need to shift their efforts to advance choice in three ways.

1. Shift from "School Choice" to "Educational Choice"

This goes beyond a change in branding, such as calling vouchers "opportunity scholarships." Rather, it's a paradigm and policy shift recognizing that formal education need not take place in a traditional classroom. Whereas vouchers and charters allowed parents to choose among schools, education savings accounts empower families to customize their child's education using a variety of options, including microschools, hybrid homeschooling,[4] online instruction, tutoring, and educational therapy.

Importantly, these options allow families to pursue classical education, a content-rich history and civics curriculum, and more rigorous curriculum generally where these opportunities are otherwise lacking.

2. Shift from "Escaping Failing Schools" to "Finding the Right Fit"

For too long, conservative rhetoric about the problem of "failing" district schools has led them to support policies that are unnecessarily divisive and restrictive. Predicating eligibility for choice programs on district schools' test scores needlessly pits families and choice advocates against educators and schools. Moreover, such policies needlessly exclude children in dire need of access to educational alternatives.

Even a school with high test scores may be a poor fit for some children, while a school with low test scores may be great for others. Children's access to a learning environment that's the right fit for them shouldn't depend on the average test score of the school down the street.

The "failing schools" paradigm also makes choice only about providing equity for the disadvantaged rather than systemic change. Equity is certainly important—it is a matter of justice—but significant improvements will require large-scale changes in how education is delivered. Low-income programs may fill empty seats at existing private schools, but they do little to foster innovation and excellence. Systemic improvement requires sufficient demand to induce new market entrants. That, in turn, requires making more well-off families eligible for choice programs too. Ultimately, the disadvantaged will benefit the most when they are in the same proverbial boat as everyone else.

3. Shift from Top-Down to Bottom-Up Accountability

Some technocratic conservatives have attempted to blend choice and accountability by imposing states' standardized tests on choice programs. While well-intentioned, such policies are misguided. Mandating a single test and attaching consequences for performance incentivizes spending less time on non-tested subjects and concepts and distorts how tested subjects are taught.[5] Studies have shown that overregulating choice programs leads to fewer

participating schools,[6] less specialization,[7] and, ironically, perhaps even lower quality.[8]

For too long, we have confused "accountability" with government regulations, but the latter are but a pale imitation of the former. True accountability is when service providers are directly accountable to the people who bear the consequences of their performance. As Levin described, systemic improvement requires "experimentation, evaluation, and evolution." Technocrats restrict education providers' ability to innovate and substitute their own judgment in place of parents' judgment, thereby interrupting this process. By contrast, when schools are directly accountable to parents, it creates the feedback loop necessary for systemic evolution.

In conclusion, conservatives who want to achieve educational excellence should abandon technocracy and embrace choice. To modify Nobel Prize–winning economist Milton Friedman's famous observation about the relationship between freedom and equality: A society that puts accountability before choice will get neither. A society that puts choice before accountability will get a high degree of both.

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When It Comes to Education, Conservatives Should Stand for Excellence

Michael J. Petrilli

As noted by many historians, the modern tale of American education is one of a pendulum swinging between concerns about excellence and equity. The Sputnik moment catalyzed worries about eroding excellence, especially in math and science; the civil rights movement and the Great Society swung our focus back to equity. *A Nation at Risk* marked the beginning of the modern "excellence movement," and No Child Left Behind took us back to equity—or what AEI's Frederick M. Hess called "achievement-gap mania"—once again.[1]

To be sure, we need not pit excellence against equity. As John Gardner asked long ago (and answered in the affirmative), "Can we be equal and excellent too?"[2] After all, there are realms where they overlap, most notably around efforts to address what some have called "the excellence gap."[3]

Let's be clear: Conservatives should not oppose equity. Indeed, much of the energy for what were once considered "conservative" education reforms comes out of the impulse to do right by poor kids. The motive behind high-quality, "no excuses" charter schools; effective, character-forming urban Catholic schools; and rigorous, proven teaching methods was a heartfelt concern about inequality, injustice, and the desire for our country to live up to its founding creed.

But let's not pretend there are not trade-offs too. In many matters of policy and practice, excellence and equity are in tension, if not actual conflict. (Consider, for instance, the scarcest resource in our schools: teachers' time and attention. Should that be allocated equally to every child? Or prioritized for those who are behind? Or those who might rocket ahead?) We can assume that progressives will always take the "equity" side (except perhaps when seeking the best for their own children). So if conservatives don't make excellence a priority, nobody will.

Excellence in Education

What exactly do I mean by "excellence"? Three things: organizational excellence, academic excellence, and excellence in extracurricular activities and other nonacademic pursuits.

Organizational Excellence. Organizational excellence is easy to understand but hard to achieve. We conservatives should defend the principle that every American child deserves to attend an excellent school—a school that fields a talented and committed staff; teaches a high-quality curriculum, regardless of its pedagogical approach; engages parents effectively; provides a positive experience for families; and, most importantly, achieves great results for its pupils.

Many progressives, especially education reformers, join us in this commitment to organizational excellence but may not be as willing to attack barriers to excellence, such as teachers union contracts that make it difficult to recruit and retain great teachers and bureaucratic structures that make it hard for

well-intentioned people to run and sustain excellent schools in a broken system.

Academic Excellence. As for academic excellence, several policies and practices belong at the top of our list. First, we conservatives should promote high standards and academic rigor and support schools and teachers who defend them. That means, for instance, pushing back against grade inflation and supporting teachers who refuse to give easy A's.[4] Second, we should have high expectations for character and behavior and reject "discipline reforms" that are another form of soft bigotry via low expectations.[5] Third, and most importantly, we should support efforts—from kindergarten through college—to nurture our most academically gifted students.

There are ways to build a system of talent identification and development that promotes both excellence and equity and thus can win progressive support as well. Such a system would have at its base a wide range of opportunities for as many young people as possible, including poor kids and kids of color, starting with sizable gifted programs in every elementary school nationwide. "Universal screening" would be essential to find any and all children with academic talent and widen the pipeline of high achievement as much as possible.

But we shouldn't shy away from selective-admissions schools like many progressives do. Exam schools at the middle and high school levels, including the famous ones such as Stuyvesant High School in New York or Lowell High School in San Francisco, have proud histories of lifting poor and working-class students to the heights of academic achievement and must be defended.[6] And we should celebrate schools such as Success Academy and many urban Catholic schools that attract highly motivated families and students from high-poverty communities.

We conservatives believe that our country should nurture God-given talent so that youngsters in every generation and from every background can go on to solve difficult problems, start great companies, expand the economic pie, and contribute to human flourishing.

Excellence Beyond Academics. Finally, we should stand up for excellence beyond academics. For example, we should support excellent technical training programs that teach craftsmanship and attention to detail and launch graduates into good-paying careers. If making such programs selective helps here, too, so be it. Not everyone has the skill or drive to do well in a technical field, and we should reserve scarce slots in great programs for students who do.

Let's also hail excellence with athletics, music and art programs, and other extracurricular activities. These parts of the US education system arguably work the best and do the most to teach students the social and emotional skills—or what we conservatives more comfortably call "character"—that everyone is now talking about. At a time when football in particular is under attack, conservatives can remind the country that much good comes from Friday night lights.

Conclusion

It is common, in a populist age, to deride excellence as "elitist." It's true that excellence is hard and scarce. But it need not be walled off from most people. Our responsibility as conservatives is to stand up for excellence and widen its availability to many more of America's children.

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Part III:
Policy Proposals

When it comes to public policy, conservatives are often better at explaining what we're against than what we are for—apart from the familiar refrains of school choice and local control. Spanning every level of government and schooling, the following proposals contain student-centered policies that offer conservatives an opportunity to take up the mantle and build out a positive vision for what we favor when it comes to education.

Replace the Federal Student Loan System with an Income Share Agreement Program

Beth Akers

We hear a lot about how student loans are unaffordable for borrowers. That notion was central in the 2020 Democratic primary race, with Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) proposing to wipe away massive amounts of debt. Student loans—an oft-forgotten policy issue in days past—were addressed in the first COVID-19 relief bill, even though many other more pressing areas of the economy were left untouched.

The problem with generous debt forgiveness plans like Sanders' and Warren's is that they deliver the biggest benefit to those who need it least.[1] College typically pays huge dividends during a career. Even with a student loan payment, people with college and graduate degrees are among the more well-off in the economy.

But sometimes college doesn't pay off,[2] and borrowers do need help. We've tried to fix this problem with a system for loan repayment that relieves borrowers from having to make unaffordable monthly payments.[3] Unfortunately, that system doesn't work well, because over time it has become a cobbled-together safety net of different programs with different terms and rules for eligibility. The result is that people who are underwater on their investment in college sometimes end up defaulting on their loans and paying an unnecessary price.

We need to replace this patchwork of programs with a simple, universal program in which all borrowers repay their federal student debt through a single plan: a government-sponsored income share agreement (ISA). While quietly embraced by conservatives for several years, the idea of using an ISA program to replace the federal lending program was formally proposed for the first time as part of Jeb Bush's campaign for the Republican nomination for president in 2016.[4] Its architect, Jason Delisle of the American Enterprise Institute, describes the proposal in detail in a recent Manhattan Institute report.[5]

The benefit of an ISA is that the amount due each month depends on only how much borrowers are earning, meaning they pay only what they can afford. That way, people who do not experience a big return on their investment in college do not have to pay back as much as do those who win big with high-paying jobs.

A related concern is that the system of student loan servicing is confusing, which often means people cannot fully take advantage of the benefits available. To simplify, we should replace the current overly complex system of student loan servicing with IRS-managed income withholding. Eliminating third-party servicers would both lower costs for taxpayers and improve the Department of Education's ability to effectively manage repayment. Unlike the current system, borrowers won't need to actively manage their repayment, either by choosing and enrolling in alternative repayment plans or by having to track and communicate with their servicer.

Together, these changes would help borrowers who find themselves struggling to make ends meet after college not be on the hook to make payments they cannot afford. They would simplify the safety net, which means more struggling borrowers would

receive the benefits they need. In addition, aspiring students who are concerned about borrowing could better understand the safety nets available to them. This could encourage more disadvantaged students to enroll in college, as they are the most likely to be concerned about unaffordable debt after graduation.

That said, the safety net implicit in this system does introduce a moral hazard: Borrowers will have less incentive to earn money if they can get off the hook for repayment. That might encourage some to take cushy jobs or even opt out of working altogether, which imposes a real cost. This is an unfortunate but necessary evil when designing safety nets, but it doesn't mean they shouldn't exist.

Additionally, if program parameters are set appropriately, they could actually reduce moral hazard relative to the current policy regime, which sometimes creates circumstances in which certain borrowers can knowingly take on additional debt without increasing the amount they'll have to repay.[6]

It's not wrong for students to have to borrow for college. But it is wrong to have a safety net for borrowers that doesn't work or to implement universal loan forgiveness that benefits those who need it least. We need a system of higher education finance that not only allows students to borrow to invest in themselves but also provides a safety net that ensures unaffordable loans don't hamstring young people for life.

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A New Agenda for Early Childhood Education

Cara Stillings Candal

High-quality early childhood education makes a difference: It increases academic attainment and pro-social behavior,[1] improves health,[2] and allows more parents to reap the benefits of work.[3] Conservatives care about early education, but liberals have made headway with universal public prekindergarten (pre-K), an expensive proposition that expands the government's footprint with no guarantee of quality.

Although access to public preschool was improving at the turn of the century,[4] it began to decline during the Great Recession and has not recovered since. In addition to 1,700 federal Head Start centers nationwide,[5] 44 states and Washington, DC, provide public preschool options.[6] Yet across the US, public programs enroll only 33 percent of 4-year-olds and 6 percent of 3-year-olds.[7] The overwhelming majority of those programs do not provide full-day options that help working parents.[8]

Increasingly, cities are making pre-K a priority. Washington, DC, has realized some success: As of 2018, 75 percent of 3-year-olds and 85 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in DC's public and charter public preschool programs.[9] But that access comes at a cost of $18,500 per child.[10] Publicly provided programs have also squeezed private preschools and day cares in DC,[11] meaning fewer, more expensive options for parents who want them.

This hefty price tag is one reason more communities have not scaled public preschool. San Antonio, Texas,[12] has a promising program, but resident support for increasing local taxes for pre-K is tenuous. Boston, Massachusetts,[13] and New York[14] have largely tacked pre-K programs onto K–12 systems. New York has improved over time,[15] but Boston struggles to provide seats for all students,[16] and questions about the quality of programming and teacher effectiveness persist. States and cities can do better.

Increasing Access

States should provide education scholarship accounts (ESAs) to parents of 3- and 4-year-olds. ESAs are funds, jointly managed by parents and the state, that allow families to choose from various private (including faith-based) and public providers and other approved educational services. ESAs are flexible. Parents could use an ESA to pay for private preschool, or they could choose a half-day public option and use the ESA for an afternoon care program. Homeschool and microschool hybrids might be an option for some families. Other approved expenses may include special education services, educational therapies, and transportation to and from school.

States could experiment by funding ESAs through tax credits or redirecting current pre-K investments to ESAs. Accounts should be available to families living at or below 400 percent of the poverty line and awarded on a sliding scale. Families with the least income would be eligible for the equivalent of a full preschool tuition (determined by the average tuition in their state). Those able to contribute more could receive up to 50 percent.

States would curate a menu of eligible providers and exclude only organizations that fail to meet broad criteria for quality. Most parents would use ESAs for academic programs. For these, states could require evidence of:

- Any curriculum focused on early literacy, numeracy, and socioemotional intelligence;
- At least one lead teacher with a bachelor's degree in any subject; and
- Compliance with the state's basic health and safety requirements for early education providers.

Expanding the School Day

To keep parents working, states should create incentives for programming that coincide with the workday. For-profit providers that expand the day could receive a tax credit. Community-based nonprofits that partner with preschools for afternoon programs could qualify for operating grants. States could increase tax credits and grants for providers that offer extended day programming that allow parents to pay on a sliding scale, as ESAs might not always cover the whole cost of a full day.

Tax credits could also spur employers to open onsite early education centers. They could provide programs at reduced cost to employees, and eligible workers could use ESA funds.

Tracking Quality

States should understand whether they are investing in quality, which means tracking outputs. Most ESA recipients will go to public schools, so indicators of success could be collected in public K–12 settings. Research suggests states should track:

- Literacy (whether students are reading on grade level by third grade),
- Achievement (whether students have repeated a grade),
- Socioemotional skills (whether students have been referred for behavioral problems or suspended from school), and
- Individualized education plans (whether students have been placed on a plan since kindergarten).[17]

These data should control for ESA recipient demographics and be transparently provided to parents and taxpayers to assess program quality and drive ESA funds to the highest-quality providers. With additional demand for their services, providers might choose to replicate or expand offerings or package and disseminate their curricula and delivery systems.

Building an Effective Workforce

Pre-K programs often require certification, but too many set a low bar. Research finds that preschool teachers who hold bachelor's degrees are more effective than their peers who do not,[18] but many states and programs require no more than a high school diploma, an associate degree, or a child development associate credential.[19] With outcomes data, states could identify providers that help ESA students succeed. Those providers could become state-approved training sites and compete for grants that would enable them to train teachers on the job. (San Antonio provides an interesting grant model.[20])

Grant recipients would have the autonomy to hire teachers in training, with the only requirement being that trainees possess a bachelor's degree in any subject area. Trainees would receive a regular salary and the benefit of a free, state-approved credential upon successful program completion. The state could track graduates for at least five years after receipt of the credential. Tracking could indicate whether the program boosts teacher retention and whether graduates help ESA recipients succeed in the K–3 setting.

States could also consider additional competitive grants for training institutions that produce effective teachers and have high rates of job placement. Institutions that help graduates find the highest-paying jobs could be eligible to compete for larger grants. These measures could increase teacher effectiveness, improve recruitment and retention, and even elevate the status of the early childhood profession.

A New Agenda

Targeted funding for families, strong incentives for various preschool providers, and an outcomes-based approach to understanding quality could prime millions of children for academic and life success. This is an education agenda that conservatives can support.

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Two Steps to Restoring School Safety

Max Eden

Conservatives should be for school safety.

It sounds so easy that it should go without saying. After all, who could be against school safety?

But the sad fact is that the progressive-minded education establishment has subordinated safety to "social justice."

Education advocates insist, against the evidence, that disparities in school discipline by race and disability status primarily reflect "institutional racism" and teachers' "implicit bias," not differences in student behavior driven by broader societal inequities. Based on this distrust and the fear that disciplining students does them serious harm, policymakers have tied teachers' hands and undermined their authority in the classroom.

The *New York Times* provided the following telling and representative anecdote about how progressive "restorative justice" policies play out in the classroom:

> Simon Whitehead, a former physical education teacher at Southwest High School in Minneapolis, said he had watched the district's discipline policy changes play out in his classes. Name-calling escalated to shoving, and then physical assaults. Profanity was redefined as "cultural dialect," he said.
>
> "It threw the school into complete chaos," he said. "The kids knew they weren't going to go home."
>
> Mr. Whitehead said he learned not to call his students out in front of their peers. He did not use the word "detention," but rather "quality time." Eventually, he would just "sweep a lot under the rug."
>
> The discipline model that he said had worked for him for 25 years—a warning, then a consequence—was no longer recognized by his bosses. He retired last year, labeled a racist.[1]

This new status quo has been a disaster. Study after study after study has documented harm to learning,[2] and school survey after survey after survey has suggested harm to school climate.[3]

And yet, progressives have assumed virtually unassailable moral high ground on this issue with one simple trick: By claiming their policies are intended to fight racism, any pushback against them is labeled an (at least) implicit defense of racism.

Republican politicians tend to view education as an opportunity to display altruism. Faced with the prospect of accusations of racism from activist groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) or the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), it's unsurprising that there hasn't been much state-level legislative action to restore discipline. The strongest action taken thus far has been North Carolina's requirement that school districts reassess their discipline policies, which led to headlines such as "Senate Votes Against Policies to Soften Racial Disparities in School Discipline."[4]

The other major impediment to addressing these policies is that the problems they cause are not readily apparent—by design. Discipline reform was implemented by a system of obfuscation enforced by recrimination. The US Department of Education threatened invasive investigations and potential loss of federal funding based on school districts' discipline numbers. Superintendents passed down the pressure to reduce discipline to principals, who passed it down to teachers. Teachers who

complained could be subject to retaliation from their principals, because their principals could be subject to demotion from their superintendents, because their superintendents could be subject to investigations and negative press coverage.

Although the Department of Education rescinded the "Dear Colleague" letter driving these investigations, the pressures to underreport have been baked in. What's more, many district leaders undoubtedly earnestly believe that reducing discipline is "social justice" and that safety and school climate problems encountered are growing pains felt by teachers who must get a grip on their implicit bias.

America's schools should not be governed by the whims of progressive groupthink. They should be governed by school boards that are responsive to parents' concerns about what's happening in their children's classrooms. But with teachers too intimidated to speak out and with school board members' tendency to defer to their superintendents, the parental/democratic feedback loop has been severed.

Although conservative state legislators may be reluctant to take direct aim at leniency policies, they can take two concrete, popular steps to repair that loop.

First, state legislatures should establish a body (ideally a nonprofit organization rather than a subdivision of a state agency) to conduct annual audits of school safety and climate through anonymous, open-ended teacher surveys. One could Google for hours in vain trying to find a teacher who went on record about discipline and safety problems, but when teachers have the opportunity to speak anonymously, they have horror stories to tell.[5] I've found only four school districts where teachers unions afforded their members this privilege. Here is a representative quote from each:

- Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: "We were told that referrals would not require suspension 'unless there was blood.'"

- Buffalo, New York: "I have never seen anything like it. The behavior is unreal. The students know they can get away with anything because there are no real consequences."

- Fresno, California: "Students are throwing rocks at teachers. When they are sent down to the office, they returned moments later."

- Broward County, Florida: "My life and the lives of my students were threatened this year and the child was in school the very next day."

Once these sentiments start circulating, the character of local news coverage changes. Rather than running puff pieces (e.g., "Student Suspensions Plummeted in This New Jersey School District. Here's How They Did It."[6]) on how suspensions are down and superintendents say that it's because schools are getting safer, local reporters start really sleuthing, publicizing teachers' concerns while protecting their identities (e.g., "Baltimore County Teachers: Culture of Leniency Leading to Violence"[7]).

Bad press may not necessarily be enough to convince a school board to reverse course. But constant haranguing by concerned parents just might.

So, second, state legislatures should mandate that every school district establish a parental advisory committee on school safety, with an agenda item at every board meeting to raise problems and concerns. This would encourage parental involvement and allow teachers another anonymous avenue to circumvent their direct superiors and have their perspective heard by the school board.

Faced with only the occasional admonishing letter from the SPLC or the ACLU, school boards are unlikely to rethink their policies. But faced with the constant, real concerns of teachers and students who don't feel safe in their classrooms, school board members would be far more likely to recalibrate their approach.

State-level conservatives too frequently brush off education as a local control issue. But for local control to work, school board members must be well apprised of what's happening in their schools. These two actions can help make that happen and are certain to be perceived as altruistic and received with approbation.

After all, who could be against giving teachers a voice? Who could be against giving parents a seat at the table? And who could be against school safety?

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Third-Party Credentialing for Higher Education

Michael B. Horn

As conservatives consider ways to crash through the growing choke hold that college degrees have held in employers' hiring processes, one idea that has gained currency is allowing federal student aid to follow students to unaccredited providers of education.[1] Conservatives have also shown interest in funding competency-based programs—in which students earn credentials for exhibiting mastery of knowledge and skills, not because of the time they attend an institution. Even as they create space for innovation in higher education, conservatives should be wary of simply writing a blank check to new entities and programs absent some accountability around the value delivered.

Accreditation—today's answer for traditional colleges and universities—is a poor model to extend to unaccredited providers for two reasons. First, accreditors focus on inputs, such as the pedigree of who teaches students, instead of value. Second, accreditors suffer from a conflict of interest because they are membership organizations that act as gatekeepers to the federal financial aid their members are eligible to receive.

There is another accountability mechanism also worth trying that could gain broader support as a discreet part of the higher education system. The federal government should foster a parallel higher education system by supporting third-party credentialing entities that validate industry-valued skills.

In such a world, institutions would no longer be the sole gatekeepers of credentials. The federal and state governments could pay institutions as students demonstrate mastery on valid and reliable assessments that third-party bodies oversee, which would help clarify the debates about whether learning at one institution is equivalent to that at another. This would in turn shift parts of higher education to a true competency-based learning system in which payment is untethered from inputs such as time and the credit hour, unlike today's versions of competency-based learning in higher education. And it would allow institutions to charge—and governments to pay—based on verifiable outcomes.

This idea would not have the federal government mandating a certain set of federal tests, a practice that would allow the federal government to dictate what is taught and learned in higher education. Rather, the federal government would entrust third-party bodies that oversee assessments—rather than degree-conferring institutions—with real currency with employers.

For example, to become a chartered financial analyst (CFA), a meaningful credential in the financial services industry, students must pass a series of three CFA exams. The CFA Institute, a nonprofit association of investment professionals that measures and certifies financial analysts' competence and integrity, administers these exams. Today, the Department of Education doesn't pay the fees associated with taking this exam, and the programs that offer support for passing it—such as Wiley, Kaplan Schweser, and the Princeton Review—don't receive federal financial aid. But the government could begin funding entities that, rather than certifying seat time, offer proof of mastery of a basket of industry-valued competencies and skills.

Similarly, an entity like Pathstream, which offers programs to help students learn digital skills

in offerings such as Facebook digital marketing, Unity immersive design, and Salesforce administration—all programs with a certificate and associated assessment that Pathstream itself does not administer—could be paid directly when its students demonstrate mastery on the assessments that have real currency in the labor market beyond the employers that oversee them.

Importantly, the conservative path should not seek to overhaul the entire credit-hour and accreditation-guarded financing system. Instead, conservatives should seek to offer a parallel path to Title IV federal aid funds that colleges and other institutions can opt in to.

In such a system, providers could still set their own prices, and students could use federal financial aid dollars—a mix of Pell Grants and loans—to choose where they enrolled. But full payment would be withheld until a student demonstrated mastery on the external assessment.

To usher in a new era of constructive innovation in higher education, students would ideally not only need a transparent view into what skills they must master to earn a certificate but also be able to take the dollars to a wide array of providers they determine could help them. Programs could produce audited quality assurance reports based on standards around learning outcomes[2] as denoted by passing rates, the percentage of students completing and time to completion, placement and return on investment, and retrospective student satisfaction, among other data to help students make sound decisions about where to enroll.

To facilitate a diverse array of innovative providers from which students could choose, the third-party certification organizations must not act akin to traditional licensing bodies. That is, they must not prescribe the inputs that learners must possess to gain a credential, but focus on only mastery. For example, in legal education today, most state bar licensing authorities require applicants for the bar examination to have a JD from an American Bar Association–accredited law school upon completion of three years of legal education. Health care credentialing bodies specify similar requirements. These sorts of requirements should be abandoned. When there is clarity about outcomes and an ability to know that students have achieved mastery on valid and reliable assessments that are not reductive, then we create opportunities for endless innovation in delivery because delivery doesn't have to be debated, only proved.

As society navigates the current uncertainty caused by a pandemic and the resulting recession, the federal government should not simply support traditional higher education institutions and preserve the status quo during this crisis. It should go beyond by working to establish a more learner-centered future. That means not only opening up federal financial aid to new forms of postsecondary education but also ensuring there's value for individuals and taxpayers as it does so.

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How States Can Use CARES Act Funds to Promote and Support Educational Choice

John Schilling

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, signed into law by President Donald Trump in March 2020, represents a rare opportunity for governors to leverage federal education funds largely unencumbered by prescriptive federal rules. The bill appropriated $16.2 billion for K–12 education, and Congress astutely set aside $3 billion of that for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) discretionary fund.

Aside from funding for equitable services—little of which has gone to private schools—most of the non-GEER K–12 funding ($13.2 billion) goes to public schools. So far, around only 10 percent of funds have been drawn down, though it is unclear how much has already been committed by state education agencies (SEAs).

Governors should use their remaining CARES Act discretionary GEER funds in bold, innovative ways that directly empower families and students. While many states submitted broad, unspecific plans for using these funds, several states have strategically invested the funding in students rather than simply allowing SEAs to absorb the funding into status quo K–12 programs.

- In South Carolina, Gov. Henry McMaster designated $32 million of the state's GEER fund to create the Safe Access to Flexible Education Grants program. These grants will support the private school tuition costs (up to $6,500 per child) of students whose household adjusted gross income is 300 percent or less of the federal poverty level. School choice opponents immediately sued, and the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled against the program. A rehearing petition is currently pending.[1]

- In Oklahoma, Gov. Kevin Stitt launched the Stay in School Fund, which provides emergency education relief to private school families that have faced hardship or income changes because of the pandemic and economic shutdown. These funds allow students to stay in the schools they're already attending to maintain educational stability and continuity. Students can receive a scholarship of either $6,500 or the 2020–21 published tuition (whichever is less) at an approved nonprofit private school. Scholarships are prioritized for families at or below 185 percent of the poverty level for the first week of funding, and then the program opens to families at or below 350 percent of the poverty level.[2]

- In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis invested $30 million in the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship and $15 million in a stabilization fund to provide grants directly to private schools that serve scholarship students and are at risk of closure due to declining enrollment. The grants will be limited to schools where 50 percent or more of students use choice scholarships.[3]

- In New Hampshire, Gov. Chris Sununu is providing $1.5 million from his GEER fund to private school scholarship organizations that participate in the state's Education Tax Credit Program. The funds will provide up to 800 new scholarships so families can choose the educational options that work best for their children during these uncertain times.[4]

- In North Carolina, the Republican-led state legislature acted boldly by leveraging unspent CARES Act funds. The legislators expanded the Opportunity Scholarship Program by raising the income limit for a family of four to $72,000 and lifting an arbitrary limit on kindergarten through first grade enrollment, allowing up to 1,000 students on the waiting list access to a school of choice. The program also allows the state's two virtual charter schools to enroll an additional 3,800 students and provides $335 grants to families with children that can be used for anything from tutoring to education technology purchases.[5]

More governors and state legislatures should follow these states' lead.

Governors in states with existing private school choice programs should allocate GEER funds to those programs. In other states, governors could follow South Carolina's example to create new private school choice programs to serve lower-income families. GEER funds can be used for various options that provide greater flexibility for families, such as hybrid homeschooling, tutoring, education technology purchases, and learning-pod expenses. When families can control their education spending—through scholarships, microgrants, or education savings accounts—they can ensure a continuous learning environment for their children throughout the year.

The pandemic has laid bare just how antiquated our K–12 system really is. Families in America want and need greater flexibility and choice to ensure their children receive a *full-time* quality education. Traditional public school students lost three months of the past school year because too many school districts proved incapable of delivering online education. The students who suffer the most are special-needs children who really need in-person instruction and children in lower-income families, 30 percent of whom lack the necessary technology for remote learning.[6]

As the 2020–21 school year begins, most public schools are using a hybrid model or are completely online. Most private schools are reopening with either in-person or hybrid instruction, with enhanced safety protocols for teachers and students. Governors should acknowledge this reality and use their remaining GEER funds to provide families with greater flexibility and choice.

Should Congress ever pass additional COVID-19 relief funding, it should follow the Senate's lead and ensure private schools and families—that are as equally affected by the coronavirus as public school families are—receive emergency aid commensurate with the number of children in private schools. Congress should include a federal tax credit to transition the emergency aid into a funding mechanism that will benefit public and private school students going forward. And it should include an additional discretionary GEER fund that will allow governors to be bold, think outside the box, and directly empower families, especially lower-income and special-needs families, to provide the best education possible for their children.

This is a time for states, in partnership with the federal government, to break the shackles of an antiquated system and truly put students' interests first.

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Make Reform Voluntary

STATE-LEVEL COMPETITIVE GRANTS

Andy Smarick

Possibly the defining feature of K–12 policy reform over the past several decades has been the growth of state-level decision-making. Although there has been much talk about the increase of Uncle Sam's role, most of the power seeping from schools has come to rest in state capitals, not Washington.

Indeed, in ways probably unimaginable 40 years ago, states have developed comprehensive policies—often uniform and applied across all public schools—in areas such as standards, assessments, teacher credentialing, district accountability, school interventions, educator evaluation, graduation requirements, seat time, discipline, school calendars, and transportation. In fact, the bill of particulars against Washington's meddling in schools typically includes initiatives that actually consolidated state power. For example, No Child Left Behind strengthened states' hand on tests and accountability, Race to the Top was a state-level grant competition, and Common Core was about state content standards.

In fairness, there is a rationale for this type of centralization. Under state statutes and regulations, state governments are given great authority over public education because state governments are ultimately responsible under state constitutions for ensuring the provision of public schools. Generally, districts are creatures of state policy; they are public bodies to which state governments delegate day-to-day control of a state-level duty. As public demands for better and fairer public schools grew over time—and as courts increasingly held states accountable for delivering on their constitutional obligations—state governments understandably exerted more influence.

This, however, comes at a steep cost: Different communities are less able to make different decisions about their schools. This leads to a level of standardization that ill fits American pluralism. It also decreases local initiative, agency, and efficacy, which increases local frustration. And it hinders citizens' acquisition of civic virtues, such as participation, civility, accommodation, and compromise—the skills and dispositions of self-government that are fostered by engaging in difficult public discussions about meaningful public decisions.

My contention is that states should pause the adoption of new uniform, statewide K–12 policies. Instead, over the next decade, if state governments want to change the direction of their public schools, they should use competitive-grant programs. I will use character education as an example of why this approach is preferable and how it would work in practice.

Given current conditions—as of writing in spring 2020—this recommendation may seem inapt. Because of COVID-19 (a public health emergency requiring a heightened degree of swift, certain, state-level authority), our tolerance of, even appreciation for, centralized power is probably at its peak. But my argument takes the long view, and it is based on general principles related to decentralized authority. When this crisis ends, we will have the chance to think anew about where governing power should reside. And it might well be that our nation's response to this pandemic makes us more aware of the downsides of decision-making that takes place far away and produces uniform policies.

State-Level Competitive Grants

In a competitive-grant program, a state government identifies an activity it would like schools or networks of schools to take on. Instead of mandating the activity, the state would make new money available that recipients could use for that purpose. Participation is voluntary. If potential recipients want to take on the activity, they can; if the activity doesn't match their vision or priorities, they can pass. And rather than distributing the money to everyone by formula, the state assesses applicants' proposals, chooses the most promising (using explicit criteria), and distributes funds based on applicants' requests.

For instance, a state could launch a character-education competitive-grant program. The state would make new funds available, say, the equivalent of 0.5 percent of the state's annual investment in schools. (So, if the state sends $1 billion to schools annually, this grant's total budget would be $5 million.) Eligible applicants could include schools, districts, charter networks, and nonprofits that partner with one of the other eligible entities. No school would be required to engage; if it decided other things needed to take precedence over character formation, it could simply ignore the grant program. The state would lay out clearly what would constitute character education and what would be allowable uses of funds (e.g., staff, instructional materials, or assessments). The state would rate applications and award grants to the most promising proposals.

This approach has many benefits. First, there's humility. With federal competitive education grants, Uncle Sam entices states or districts to do things he likes but doesn't have the power to require. So he uses competitive grants to increase his reach. But with state competitive grants, state leaders merely encourage activity that they could require. That is, states use a light touch when they could be heavy-handed. So instead of mandating a statewide character-education curriculum or requiring a character-education course for high school graduation, they incentivize participation.

Second, there's respect for local prerogatives and differentiation. Competitive grants recognize that school and system leaders have their own priorities and constituencies. These differ by location, and they often differ from those of the state's leadership. With character education, there are legitimate differences of opinion about which elements should be prioritized in instruction. Public service or self-actualization? Honesty or loyalty? Epistemic humility or the courageous pursuit of justice?

Under a competitive-grant program, a state could choose a narrow definition for character (if it believes only one approach is worth funding) and then make awards to just those applicants that hew to that vision. Or the state, if it believes any explicit character-related initiative is better than no character initiative at all, could promulgate more flexible criteria and make awards to a variety of approaches. Either way, local decision makers could follow their own values.

Third, unlike a "local control of all matters" approach, competitive grants allow state leaders to influence key issues. State governments provide a great deal of money to public schools and have serious constitutional obligations; they should be able to influence what happens in schools. A state's leadership might well conclude that it has focused too narrowly on reading and math for too long and has neglected the role schools should play in forming citizens. A character-education grant program would be a way for the state to publicly signal its priorities and shape what schools do.

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, competitive grants force states to put some skin in the game. In many cases of education policy, states can incur virtually no costs while forcing schools and districts to do things. For example, a statute can require districts to hire teachers with certain credentials, a regulation can mandate that schools offer certain courses, a state-board ruling can require districts to follow certain discipline procedures, and a guidance letter can force administrators to compile data and submit reports. These are easy decisions, in a sense, for the state, because they can be made without breaking open the checkbook or taking responsibility for implementation. But school operations get distorted when distant leaders make decisions with minimal appreciation for budgetary and operational effects.

With competitive grants, a state must find new money—beyond existing per-pupil dollars distributed according to a state funding formula—for its priority. Because state-government budgets have to be balanced annually, and because most state leaders just want to increase formulaic dollars, a state's leadership must really believe in a policy if it is going to fund a competitive-grant program. So before launching a character-education competitive grant initiative, state leaders will have to believe this issue is important enough to warrant new money, to spend that money outside agreed-upon formulas, and to elevate it above other causes seeking funds. We should want state education leaders to have this kind of focus before pressing ahead with new programs.

Except for school choice and charter school laws, state policy developments over the past two generations have tended toward centralization and uniformity. Some of this was valuable. But it is worth asking whether we've now wrung all—or at least most—the utility out of this approach. We should expect much of that framework to stay in place for some time; I, for one, am not in favor of a massive rollback of standards, assessments, and accountability. The question is whether future policies should rely on state-level solutions or energize local initiative and differentiation.

New Way of Doing Business

Although my example was character education (which I do believe deserves greater attention), states may decide that arts, civics, career and technical education, gifted education, history, early-childhood education, STEM, or something else deserves prioritization. Importantly, the mechanism of state-level competitive grants is agnostic about content. Instead, it establishes a way of doing business. It allows the state to shape public schooling, but it substitutes incentives for mandates, and it requires the state to put skin in the game. At the same time, it respects local leaders' smarts, energy, and preferences, and it trusts that on many K–12 policy matters, a degree of local differentiation is both inevitable and valuable.

Vigorous efforts to improve America's schools should continue. But reform needn't always come as requirements from distant authorities. An era of state-level competitive grants would enable local practitioners and social entrepreneurs to lead the charge—by either innovating within the parameters of a state-level incentive grant or forgoing such programs entirely and setting off on their own.

Focus on Early Literacy

COMMON CURRICULUM AND BETTER TEACHER TRAINING

Robert Pondiscio

Conservatives tend to view enhanced and expanded school choice as a singular lever to improve education outcomes. The logic is clear and compelling, even elegant: When schools compete for students, they have every incentive to hire the best teachers, adopt a high-quality curriculum, embrace the highest possible standards, and strive for the best outcomes. If they fall short in any of these or other dimensions, another school down the block will be only too happy to serve that student—and pocket the dollars that generous and optimistic citizens have allocated in hopes of ensuring that every child gets what he or she needs to become a literate, educated, and self-sufficient adult.

This free-market view of schooling, while directionally sound, elides a crucial problem often lost on non-educators: "Innovation," where it exists, tends to be aimed at delivering education—the process, not the product. The vast weight of the education reform movement, now more than three decades old, has paid little attention to curricular content and pedagogy—what gets taught and how. This may explain why student achievement has changed so little over time as measured by, for example, reading scores among 17-year-olds on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the de facto final exam for America's K–12 schools.[1]

In the main—and for good reasons—thoughtful conservatives tend to be uneasy crossing the classroom threshold and micromanaging what happens inside. Curriculum battles are both frustrating and fraught. In a recent paper for the Hoover Institution, former Education Secretary William J. Bennett observed how "the lack of conservative consensus on content has very real and very negative consequences." More ominously, he concluded, "The vacuum cedes the field to the other side, who knows very well what it intends to do."[2]

Conservatives like Bennett are rightly concerned about the *New York Times*' "1619 Project" and its unsparing view of America's history as structurally and irredeemably racist. Efforts to enshrine those views in history curricula may well inspire folks on the political right to overcome their reluctance to engage on classroom content. But the more critical battle is in early childhood literacy.

The past few years have seen a pair of developments in education that might warrant deeper consideration by potential curriculum advocates on the right: a groundswell of interest in the "science of reading"[3] and a burgeoning awareness and alarm *among teachers* that they have been sent into classrooms inadequately prepared to teach the subject. At the same time (perhaps driven by the education reform movement's lack of broad, measurable impact), there has been a renewed interest in curriculum, including efforts to evaluate its quality and incentivize its adoption. As David Steiner, executive director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, has observed, "*What* we teach isn't some sidebar issue in American education; it is American education."[4]

In 2018, Emily Hanford of American Public Media produced a radio documentary titled "Hard Words."[5]

Education news, let alone deep-dive stories about classroom practice, rarely makes the front page, but Hanford's piece about how poorly teachers are prepared to teach reading ignited a storm among education practitioners that is still burning hot two years later. It brought into sharp relief the poor preparation classroom teachers receive from their schools of education, which generally are concerned with arcane matters of theory and teaching methods. The nuts and bolts of teacher training—classroom management and lesson delivery—tend to be left to schools and districts to manage.

Separately, a handful of forward-looking states and school districts are starting to get serious about curriculum. Under former State Superintendent John White, for example, Louisiana put curriculum reform at the center of its education agenda while still honoring local control of schools. The state worked with its teachers to evaluate curricula across grades and subject areas, created incentives for adopting the highest-rated programs, and aligned professional development and assessments to it—a virtuous circle that improved the materials put in front of children not by imposing them from above but by incentivizing their adoption.

If there is one area in which conservatives should overcome any lingering aversion to being prescriptive about classroom practice, it is early childhood literacy. Early reading failure is as close to determinative as any outcome in educational research: Nearly 90 percent of struggling first graders are still struggling in fourth grade,[6] three out of four struggling third-grade readers are still struggling in ninth grade,[7] and one in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time—a rate four times greater than for proficient readers.[8] Given that the vast majority of teachers in a given state are trained and licensed in that state, it would be appropriate and not governmental overreach for states to adopt—or at the very least incentivize adoption of—one or more early childhood reading curricula and require teachers to be trained in their implementation as a condition of licensure.

The most recent review of teacher preparation programs by the National Council on Teacher Quality found that 51 percent of 1,000 elementary teacher prep programs now emphasize reading science—the first time that number crossed the halfway mark, and up from just 35 percent seven years ago.[9] This is an encouraging development but not sufficient. It's not unlike flight schools training future pilots to understand Bernoulli's principle and the physics of flight but leaving it to airlines to train them on how to take off and land a commercial airliner—with passengers strapped in behind them.

At a literacy summit hosted earlier this year by the Council of Chief State School Officers, David Steiner observed that state education departments exhibit "a curious fear of universities."[10] This is strange, he said, because states "have multiple tools at their disposal,"[11] including accreditation of schools of education and teacher certification. Those fears can be overcome with political support. Or prodding. A state would be within its rights to insist, for example, not just that early childhood teachers be taught the "science of reading" as a condition of licensure, but that they be trained and demonstrate competence teaching a specific curriculum.

Conservatives have generally lost their appetite for curriculum battles, in favor of fights over school choice. But if there is one aspect of schooling that should be common to all schools, public and private, secular and sectarian, it's ensuring that children from all backgrounds are given a fighting chance to get to the academic starting line by the end of second grade. Common English language arts curriculum in the early years—and a teacher training and licensure strategy to ensure it gets taught—is our best chance of making that happen.

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A Constitutional Right to a High-Quality Public Education

Nina Rees

Windows of transformational change often open after periods of national upheaval. COVID-19 highlighted the vast divide between schools and students that could seamlessly shift to online, home-based education and those that couldn't. Students in the bottom 10 percent of the socioeconomic distribution are already up to four years behind those in the top 10 percent,[1] and the effects of the pandemic will widen the gap.

It's easy to look at COVID-19 as a call to action to give every student access to a Chromebook and Wi-Fi at home. But the real imperative is to address the persistent underlying reasons our education system has prevented generations of students from low-income families and students of color from receiving a high-quality education. Quite simply, the education system, organized to protect adults' interests, has failed students. Decades of institutional reform efforts have failed to make consistently high-quality schools available to all students.

To remedy this injustice, we need to shift the balance of power away from the education establishment toward families. We can do that by making access to a high-quality public education a constitutionally protected civil right.

Having worked at the US Department of Education during the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), I can attest that the endless struggle between the federal government and the states often leaves education policy mired in half measures and recriminations. The federal government has historically resented states that don't seem to be focused enough on student outcomes, while state governments resent the federal government for intruding on state prerogatives with rigid expectations and unfunded mandates. This was true under NCLB and continued under the Barack Obama administration's Race to the Top program.

Now that the Every Student Succeeds Act has sent power back to states, students in states with innovative leaders committed to a high-quality education stand to benefit. But in states where governors are either lethargic or captive to the education bureaucracy, students will not be well served by the federal government's retreat. These students and their parents need a mechanism to force state leaders to focus on improving student outcomes rather than placating special interests. A state constitutional right to a high-quality public education can be that mechanism.

Some conservatives will balk at the idea of enshrining a right to a high-quality public education in state constitutions. The objections are known: concerns about unleashing waves of lawsuits from self-styled children's lobbies, unions, and even school districts; the potential that judges will become education policymakers; and the fear that the only way to satisfy such an educational right is to push spending and taxes ever higher.

Yet well-crafted constitutional provisions would answer these concerns and help correct the flow of policy in recent decades that has given more power to the educational establishment while stymieing parents' efforts to direct their children's education. Here are three reasons conservatives ought to embrace making high-quality public education a constitutional right.

First, a constitutional right to a high-quality public education should not confer a right to sue for individual services, as exists with the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act. Rather, it should ensure that students who are not receiving a quality education can band together (with their parents) to demand remedies through the legislature. This would give students and parents more power to hold government accountable for ensuring education policy decisions prioritize the needs of students rather than the needs of bureaucrats, special interest groups, and other entrenched operators. And it would make students and parents the primary stakeholders.

Second, elected governors and legislators, not judges, would continue to make education policy decisions in accordance with a constitutional right to a high-quality public education. While some judges would undoubtedly be tempted to take on a more activist role, new constitutional provisions on educational quality should empower them to make only binary rulings, either upholding a law as constitutional or invalidating it as unconstitutionally harmful to students. Courts have played this role effectively for more than a century in the context of equal protection jurisprudence. If a law were found unconstitutional, legislators and governors, not judges, would craft the replacement policies.

Third, a constitutionally protected right to a high-quality public education could broaden policymakers' focus to include not just spending and inputs but also outcomes. The tendency now is to assume that higher spending is a victory for students without determining whether spending in some areas produces better returns for students than spending in other areas does. That would change if we established an explicit mandate for quality. As long as achievement gaps persist, policymakers would be incentivized—even required—to try new approaches to education that chip away at those gaps. This could mean more support for policies such as educational choice and innovation and less support for policies such as union seniority rules that reward teachers for years on the job rather than results in the classroom.

Bipartisan coalitions in California and Minnesota are now working to include a constitutional right to a high-quality public education in their state constitutions. One leader of the Minnesota effort is Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank President Neel Kashkari, a former George W. Bush administration official and Republican candidate for governor of California. The proposed Minnesota amendment[2] enjoys broad bipartisan polling support, including 65 percent approval among Republicans.[3]

More conservatives should lead or join such efforts to help shape the details of any constitutional amendments that are put on state ballots and, ultimately, to ensure that students' and parents' interests take precedence in education policymaking.

When the COVID-19 crisis is over, more money will be spent on educational technology in communities across America. That will be a good investment in children. But simply adding more resources to flawed systems won't guarantee student success. We need real change to improve educational outcomes for students. We can achieve it by giving students and parents the power to insist that legislators and governors make high-quality public education a priority.

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Conclusion

Any conservative who works in education policy, no matter how passionate or knowledgeable, is all too familiar with this lament: Other than "more choice" and "less Washington," what are conservatives for? Put another way, what are we proposing that will improve Americans' lives and communities, cultivate our shared values, and extend opportunity? The answers are, too often, hard to find.

When the education debate hinges on the question of who will funnel more dollars into subsidizing 20th-century bureaucracies, conservatives are destined to lose. But it's worth asking: Who actually wants to win that argument? The advantages that progressives enjoy when education becomes a bidding war quickly turn into weaknesses when the question is who is able and willing to redesign institutions that no longer work for families, students, or taxpayers. Conservatives are uniquely positioned to do more than subsidize the status quo—to instead provide new opportunities and bust the self-serving trusts that dominate the education landscape.

This collection of ideas is far from exhaustive. We are in no way certain that these proposals are the right ones in all cases or that they are optimally configured. The larger point, though, of which we are quite certain, is that it is past time for conservatives to broaden an opportunity agenda that has too often suffered for being pinched, narrow, and ultimately unpersuasive.

As we look into 2021 and beyond, we hope the ideas in this volume will help coordinate a burst of energy on the right and propel the conservative movement beyond its traditional education litany.

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Acknowledgments

We are much obliged to all those who have been involved and shaped our thinking on this project. In particular, we would like to thank the authors for their thoughtful contributions and willingness to engage in this most important discussion of how to propel conservative education ideas forward.

We are deeply indebted to AEI and its president, Robert Doar, for their steadfast support. We'd also like to acknowledge the terrific staff at AEI, especially RJ Martin, Julia Faulkner, Sarah Crain, Rachel Hershberger, Joseph Bebel, Charlotte Salley, and Ben Strachman for their vital assistance.

Seeking to imagine what a robust conservative education agenda might look like, we invited a collection of education thinkers to sketch brief proposals that go beyond the traditional conservative litany. This booklet is not intended to be read as a comprehensive package or viewed as a handy "conservative education policy" playbook. Rather, in the spirit of AEI's fierce commitment to the competition of ideas, the hope is that this anthology will spark creativity on the right and deepen our sense of what is possible when it comes to improving American education.

"Conservatives know that student effort and great teaching are the foundation of academic achievement. This collection of essays offers a range of sharp, timely thinking that will enrich the education policy debate and help policymakers and communities improve our nation's schools."

—**Rod Paige**, Former US Secretary of Education

"The next phase of education reform will depend on creative ideas from policy thinkers who know not only what they don't like about the status quo but what would make things better. This extraordinary collection suggests conservatives are increasingly ready to lead that next phase, and that the benefits for American students could be enormous."

—**Yuval Levin**, Director of Social, Cultural, and Constitutional Studies and Editor of *National Affairs*, American Enterprise Institute

"At their best, conservative education policies seek to clear a path to the best in education practices for our students and families, and protect the right of all students to access the schooling they desire and deserve. Anyone with a stake in education policy or governance would do well to peruse these proposals, which disclose the obvious benefits of ignoring unproductive heirloom practice in favor of addressing immediate student needs."

—**Lisa Graham Keegan**, Former Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction; Principal Partner, Keegan Company

"It is a lot easier these days to know what conservatives are against in education than what they are for. This volume should help solve that problem. You won't agree with every idea put forward. You won't think all of them are conservative. But collectively they provide the building blocks for a robust alternative to the progressive gospel that too often dominates the conversation on how to improve American schools."

—**Martin West**, William Henry Bloomberg Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

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